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THE

CHRONICLE

OF

ETHELFLED.

SET FORTH BY

THE AUTHOR OF "MARY POWELL."

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PREFACE.

WE would not adviſe the frugal reader to conſume too much midnight oil in aſcertaining the authenticity of this pſeudo-chronicle, leſt he thereby impair his entertainment. We have collated it with that of Aſſer, from whoſe manuſcript we derive nearly all the information we poſſeſs, and are accuſtomed to believe, of our glorious king. But doubts have been raiſed concerning the genuineneſs even of Aſſer's work; and had ALFRED written his life himſelf, there be thoſe who would have found it done amiſs. Let us earneſtly enjoin the reader, therefore, to believe as much or as little of this work as he chooſes: taking heed not to call anything in it an anachroniſm

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till he has ſearched the Saxon hiſtorians and likewiſe Sharon Turner; leſt peradventure he himſelf be caught tripping.

There ſeemed no reaſon why our pſeudo-tranſlation ſhould not be in the modern vernacular, ſave in the occaſional uſe of an archaiſtic expreſſion which had "no incongruity nor unnatural ſtrangeneſs," to ſuggeſt the good abbeſs's own uſe of an evident Saxoniſm badly Latinized.

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CHRONICLE of ETHELFLED.

BOOK I.

INASMUCH as ſundry perſons have taken in hand, whether with or without reaſon, to ſet forth in order the notable things which in divers times and places have happened, it ſeems good alſo to me, Ethelfleda, Abbeſs of this poor houſe of St. Audrey, to record certain events, for cauſes that will in fit ſeaſon appear.

I Ethelfled, ſecond daughter of Athelred, ſurnamed Mucil, Earl of the Gaini,[1] was born in the year of our Lord's incarnation 858. My ſiſter Ethelſwitha was by five years my elder. Now it came to paſs, about a week after her firſt coming into this naughty world, that my mother had a dream concerning her, ſomewhat after the faſhion of the patriarch Joſeph, to the effect that

[1] Gainſborough.

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the child newly born ſhould eventually be ſet up on high, and that her father, mother, and kindred ſhould do homage to her, which in due time came to paſs. And this gives me occaſion to think that dreams are not always mere phantaſies of the brain, but that on occaſions ſuited for the diſcernible action of a ſuperior intelligence, viſions of forthcoming events are ſometimes diſcloſed to the inward and ſpiritual ſight.

By reaſon of the frequent incurſions of the pagans, who laid hands alike on live ſtock, arms, cheſts of plate, and noble damſels, my father was fain to commit my ſiſter and me to the care of an aunt, who was Superior of one of the very few religious houſes left in Mercia for the refuge of holy and high-born virgins. This was about the time of the good King Ethelbert's death. Ethelred his brother then reigned over Weſt Saxony in his ſtead. That was in the days of our King Buhred. It mattered very little to my ſiſter and me who reigned, as long as mother Gundred let us ſee her hive the bees and take the honey. Ethelſwitha was fairer and more facetious than I, therefore the greater favourite; and being by ſo many years my

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elder, had many pleaſures and indulgences which I had not; but, on the other hand, I had many pleaſures too, all to myſelf. For inſtance,—fabling certain flowers to talk to one another and to me, and to tell of their how and about. Alſo fancying certain trees and patches of chalk on the hill-ſide into images of dragons and ghoſts until I was ſore ydrad, and yet feeling a ſtrange mixture of pleaſure and trepidation in going up to the dragon's mouth with a handful of graſs, and ſaying, "Dragon, will you bite me?" and then running away. There were certain peep-holes through the oak-palings, and dark corners among the tree-roots, that I ſhould have been ſorry if any had wiſt of except myſelf. Once, lying under a hollow oak, I ſeemed to feel the fairies pulling at my hair, that they might get withinſide of the trunk. One of my peep-holes looked into our burial-ground. I knew defunct perſons lay there, their faces all turned upward; and my aunt the Abbeſs told me their ſouls went to heaven. I thought if I kept a ſharp look-out, I ſhould ſee ſome of them going there, on a ſtarry night, if any of the nuns would but die.

There was a Siſter who, I think, was as

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learned as Leobgitha, the correſpondent of Boniface. She was always making enigmata, and poring over manuſcripts. Of her I acquired my facility of writing, which the King ſays is remarkable; but, in regard of its neatneſs, I am always at the mercy of my pen;—however, I now always have a good one.

About the year 869, my ſiſter and I were ſent home. Thenceforth, my father, mother, and Ethelſwitha were much at court; but, by reaſon of my tender years, I went not. After one of theſe their viſits, it was currently reported among us that Alfred, Prince of the Weſt Saxons, whoſe ſiſter had married our king, would ſhortly come to ſee our chaſe. The beſt tablecloth was waſhed, and many diſhes were cooked; howbeit, he came not. The fewer, the better cheer; and I was leſs diſappointed than was Ethelſwitha. This time, ſhe told me ſo many fine things about the court, that when they all returned to it, which they ſhortly did, I felt for the firſt time lonely. They had made a pretty clear larder before they went, and I was left nominal miſtreſs of the houſehold, both ſervile and freed, but with very little to do, except to ſee a ſtag now and then put his head

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out of the foreſt. They might have been gone three hours, and I was eating bread and honey, when there winds me a horn at the gate, and, lo you, Prince Alfred come by himſelf, and nobody to receive him. Eadwulf took his horſe and his ſpear, and Urfried waſhed his feet; but what could we do? The beſt tablecloth in the buck-baſket, no freſh meat in the larder, nor had I even the key of the cellar. There were eels in the dike; and a gooſe hung by the wall, if he would have waited to have it boiled: howbeit, he made light of all, ſaid bread and honey was fit for a king, eſpecially when the bread was warm, and the honey freſh from the comb; and Adam's wine was better than mead or metheglin for a water-drinker like himſelf, who ſhunned wine and cyder like John the Baptiſt. I was glad to find him ſo eaſy to pleaſe; indeed, had never lighted on ſo cheerful and winſome a young gentleman; and, having ſeen but few gentlemen before, whether young or otherwiſe, by reaſon of our retired living, I ſhortly loſt all fear, forgot he was a prince, and made him welcome to what we had, as freely as if I had known him twelve years, that is to ſay, my whole life. He aſked me how I came to be ſo

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ſmall for my age. But I could not tell. He aſked me if I could read, if I ſaid my prayers, if I loved bread and honey, and if I were afraid of him. To the three firſt I ſaid yes; to the laſt, no. He ſaid that was right, and aroſe puſhing aſide the yldeſtan-ſetl, and bade me good ſpeed, and bear in mind King Solomon's ſaying, "To eat much honey is not good;" and ſo departed. But, when he had mounted, his horſe reared at our white owl, that ſuddenly flew out of its hole, and threw the prince, whom we picked up with his bright hair all dabbled with blood, and brought into the houſe. He did not ſeem to regard it much, but gave his orders to one and the other with wonderful preciſion; and, being laid on a double-ſetl, Urfried and I waſhed and bound up his wound as we beſt could, and two of our freedmen rode off to advertiſe the King, and bring back my father and mother. Hereabouts, I Ethelfled muſt relate that Urfried's fear of approaching the blood royal had at firſt been ſo oppreſſive and unwiſelike, that ſhe had thruſt me forward into office more cowardly than a woman of her years needed to have been; but, as ſoon as ſhe found the prince affable, would have made my tender

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age a reaſon for ſetting me aſide, and ſtepping into my place. Howbeit, his grace ſettled it by deſiring ſhe ſhould inſtantly make him a diſh of frumenty, and ſtir it herſelf all the while it boiled; and then he bade me ſit over-againſt him on a tripod ſtool, keep an eye to his bandages, and nurſe him the beſt I could; obſerving that he always found himſelf the better for a great deal of attention.

And hereupon enſued a diſcourſe, wherewith I have frequently recreated my nuns by repeating it to them. Poor maids! they ſometimes get a little dull, ſpecially between Whitſuntide and Chriſtmas, when there are no great feſtivals; and I find nothing ſooner brings all things ſtraight than a little innocent converſation, chiefly in the infirmary, where a good many find themſelves in the fruit and pulſe ſeaſon, and a good many more contrive to be nurſes. We ſhould never forget we were once young ourſelves.

After I had held my peace a good while, the prince aſked me if I could tell him a ſtory. Thereupon I put it to him whether he would have Morvidus and the dragon, or Corineus and the great giant Goëmaggot. In reply he ſaid,

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that when he had heard both, he would make his choice. So I told him firſt one, and then the other, and proceeded to aſk him whether he thought there had ever been a dragon. He ſaid, yes, there was one always going about, ſeeking whom it could devour. I ſaid I hoped it would never come my way. He ſaid, oh yes, it would, ſooner or later; I muſt mind what I did, or even thought, or he would ſwallow me at a ſnap. So then I found who he meant.

I aſked him whether he would not like to ſee a fairy. He ſaid he had ſeen one once: he was riding one day, all alone, through a dark, glooming wood, when he came upon a bright, green glade; and there, very much to his ſurpriſe, he ſaw a fairy. I could not help drawing a little nearer to him on this, to aſk him what the fairy was like. He ſaid, like a woman, only a very ſmall one, with a lily ſkin, and long ſilky hair, and dreſſed in blue. I ſaid I thought they always wore green. He replied, "Why, they do ſay ſo, but this one had a cyrtle juſt like yours, with a little darn in the hanging ſleeves, from her leaning on her elbows." So then I ſaid, Oh . . . . ! and was a little ſhamed; for I found he meant me.

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He aſked me what I would give to ſee a giant. I ſaid, a good deal. He ſaid, that was no anſwer at all; would I give the next handſome preſent I expected to have, whatever it might be? After ſome thought, I ſaid yes, provided I were out of harm's way. He ſaid, Ah, he had been thinking of giving me ſomething very coſtly, in return for my civility to him, but now he would keep it for himſelf, and take me with him to fight the Danes, for he underſtood they had juſt landed a giant as big as Goliath, very fond of human fleſh, eſpecially when young and tender; whoſe fiſt was heavier than a hundred ſledge-hammers, and his foot as large as this . . . here he drew the outline of a foot about a yard long in the air; his cloak was fringed with kings' beards and ladies' treſſes; and there was a yard or ſo of fringe yet wanting. He ſhould like to go out againſt him like David the ſon of Jeſſe, and bring him down with a pebble. He'd teach giants to come to England!

I ſaid, I marvelled that the Danes dared intrude on us as they did. He ſaid, "Why, I ſuppoſe you know we are only intruders ourſelves. What fellowſhip have we with the old Britons whom we have hunted into the Cambrian

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dens and faſtneſſes? Surely you have heard of wicked Vortigern, king of the Britons, who firſt invited us over, under Hengiſt and Horſa; and how, when the pagan Hengiſt (for we were all pagans then) came into his Chriſtian preſence, he ſaid, 'I regret your ungodlineſs, but am glad of your coming.' King Vortigern ought to have known better, but he was much given to drinking and ſleeping, whereas our Hengiſt, pagan though he was, was a brave and fine fellow, ſtanding ſeven feet high, as I have been told by one who never ſaw him. But Vortigern was nidering, and deſerved the end he had, which was to be ſmothered with ſmoke in his faſtneſs, like a waſp in his neſt."

After ſome farther parley on this and that, he called for another ſtory. I ſaid, I have told you two, you muſt now tell me one. He ſaid, "Two? you have told me a hundred!" I ſaid, "How can that be?" and juſt then my father and mother came in, ſomewhat to my regret; they having met ſome one on the road who told them of Prince Alfred's viſit, which cauſed them to turn back. They fell to condoling and excuſing; and the Prince ſaid there was no need; he had been ſo deftly tended by the handieſt

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little chatterbox he had ever met with in all his life. Thereupon my mother looked grave, ſaying I had commonly been accounted ſilent; which indeed was true enough, and I wiſt not how my tongue had on this occaſion become looſed. But there was ſomething about him, methinks, that thawed all hearts. My mother applied all-heal and wound-wort to his head; and I kept near him all I could; but Ethelſwitha approached him not, only queſtioned me ſtraitly at bed-time, of all he had ſaid, ſo that we ſpent half the night in talking.

It was Ethelſwitha's wont to take me on her knee, and with her ſilver comb to comb out my hair, which was not nearly equal, in length, to her own; her locks being, indeed, as long and yellow as Queen Guinever's. Seeing me hold ſomething faſt in my hand, ſhe ſayeth, "What have you there?" I laughed, and would make her gueſs; at length, ſaid, "Some of the prince's hair which we cut off to waſh his wound." "His hair?" then cries ſhe, "what are you going to do with it?" I ſaid, "Make a ball of it." "Oh, ſilly, ſilly child," ſhe then cries; "forſooth you muſt give it me, I will find a better uſe for it." But I cloſed my fingers

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faſt on it, and ſaid, "What ſhall you, then, do with it?" After a pauſe, ſhe ſaid, "Uſe it in place of gold thread to embroider a kerchief for the Virgin." So I gave her all but one long, pale brown curl, which I have even now, (for it is not every one can ſhow a lock of the hair of King Alfred,) but, in truth, Ethelſwitha kept not her vow, for the Virgin's kerchief has never been embroidered from that day to this.

Next morning, I was ſummoned to my mother, who was ſitting ſurrounded by her maids. "Child," ſays ſhe, "Urfried tells me there was a bare larder yeſterday, which I partly apprehended, though enough went down from the hall, I ſhould have thought, to have kept you for a week. However, twice-warmed meats are not for a royal table; and yet his grace informed me over-night, you had feaſted him like a king! What am I to believe?"

My heart ſmote me when I bethought me of the havock we two had made, and I cried haſtily, "In troth, mother, 'twas he emptied the honey-pot rather than I, he laid it on ſo thickly; and I dared not ſay him nay!" My mother could not forbear ſmiling; ſaying, as ſhe tapped me

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on the cheek, "Well, you ſeem to have ſaved the credit of the houſe."

Before noon, that day, there was a dinner prepared that might have been ſet on King Arthur's round table. I peeped through a chink, and ſaw Ethelſwitha preſent the baſin, and my father carve the veniſon, and my mother kiſs the cup. Howbeit, the prince only touched it with his lips; ſo demand was made for ſpring-water, which, amid ſo many ſweet and ſpiced beverages, had never been provided; and, every hand being buſy, Urfried gave me a pitcher, and bade me run down to the ſpring, which I gladly did. By the ſpring ſate an old man, tuning a harp. I bade him make way, becauſe I was in haſte for water for Alfred the prince. He ſaid, "Is Prince Alfred here?—then I will into earſhot of him, for he loves the ſound of a harp . . . ." and, following me up to the houſe, he commenced playing at the gate, and was ſoon let in. In truth, the afternoon proving rainy, and the prince drinking no wine, nor playing at tæfel, ſcaccorum, nor any game of hazard, this old harper's arrival was very opportune, for he went on, from one ballad to another, as if his head were lined with them, and Alfred the prince

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was hugely pleaſed; in ſpecial with one that told how Baldulf got into King Arthur's camp, diſguiſed as a glee-man, and, while he was harping, learned all he wanted to know, without ever being found out. He called it a good ſtratagem.

At length the prince aſked the harper if he had ever heard of the ſong of Cædmon. "That have I, my prince," returned the minſtrel; "and can ſing it, too: how that ſome of the angels kept not their firſt eſtate, but fell into perdition, becauſe they would have ſhared glory with the Higheſt; and how He made for thoſe perfidious an exiled home. Sweet as honey is that ſtave deſcribing their firſt bliſs:—

> "'They were very happy,—
> Sin they knew not,
> Nor to frame crimes;
> But they in peace lived.'

Alſo, how the earth and ſtars came to be created out of nothing; and how the firſt man and woman, beautiful as angels, dwelt in Eden-garden: 'tis a ſong-o'-Sunday!"

"Sing me as much as you can of it," ſays the prince, "and I will preſently give you this gold bracelet."

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"I dare say your glory knows," pursued the harper, (who was a Cornishman; his name was Tinne,) "how holy Aldhelm availed himself of this our vocation to instruct the lower sort, and took his stand on the public bridge, like a common harper, to win the ears of the foot-passengers by intermingling gay and grave matters." . . .

"Aye! believe ye," interrupted the prince; "I have heard all about him a hundred times; but now begin your song, or you will not conclude till midnight."

* * * * *

The following year, (868,) there befel a grievous murrain among all cattle; and after the murrain a famine throughout the land; and after the famine, a pestilence; so that the hand of the Lord was heavy upon man and beast. It was lamentable to see the dead bodies left by the way-side, with none to cover them out of the reach of birds and dogs. The poor people might be seen ravening on half-putrid flesh, and eagerly devouring the cresses and ramps that grew in the ditches; which unwholesome diet was enough of itself, my mother thought, to account for the pestilence. But the failure of

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the crops was a manifeſt viſitation of God; and as He foreknew that the ſcarcity of wholeſome diet muſt needs drive the people to eat that which was pernicious and unclean, the ſickneſs, to my mind, was an indirect chaſtiſement from Him too. We gat much to our knees in prayer; and Ethelſwitha, who was very ſoft-hearted, prayed my mother to let her have all the bones, ſcraps, and broken food from our table, to ſeethe into pottage for the poor, and diſpenſe at our own gate, which my mother willingly did, and thereby drew down on our houſe many a poor ſoul's bleſſing. And it befel that, one forenoon, Ethelſwitha and I, having provided a larger meſs than uſual, and carrying it forth to the folk at the gate, ſteaming, and very ſavoury, there appears Alfred the prince ſtanding among the reſt, looking fixedly upon Ethelſwitha, who at firſt marked him not; and preſently, without more ado, he ſteps up, and kiſſes her before all; an unfair thing for even a king's ſon to do, ſeeing ſhe could not defend herſelf by reaſon of the full bicker. And the people, with one accord, ſet up a ſhout, as if it were the jollieſt ſight eyes ever ſaw, to the great ſhame of Ethelſwitha.

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The prince dined and ſupped with us, and told us of many things he had ſeen in Rome when he was a cniht;[1] and talked, and harped, and ſang, and did more to entertain us than we could do to entertain him: in ſpecial, as Ethelſwitha was quite dull all the afternoon. But I was full blythe, and at laſt he fell to talking with me more than any: only it befel, that while we were cracking and eating ſome nuts, he pauſed of a ſudden, and I looked up and ſaw his lips quite white, or rather blue, and a cold, grey ſhadow on his brow. I cried, "Oh, mother!" and ſhe aroſe in haſte, ſaying, "What ails you, ſweet prince?" and commenced rubbing his hands. But preſently he ſmiled, and ſaid, "This prick at the heart is paſſing off .... it is all for my good!" Howbeit, there was no more merrymaking that afternoon, but we ſate cloſer and quieter, and looked more earneſtly at one another, and talked of prayers, and ſaints, and penances, and heavenly chaſtenings, and earthly probations, and celeſtial refreſhings; and I think the latter end of that day was better than the beginning. He ſpent two days with us; and on the evening of the ſecond day, he

[1] A little boy: a lad.

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took my father aſide, and had long ſpeech of him;—we concluded, concerning the pagans, who ſeemed drawing together in Northumbria, upon ſome miſchief. It may or may not have been ſo; howbeit, my father came forth from the conference with a ſtrange mixture of care and elation on his brow; and the prince was much fluſhed, and ſprang on his horſe, that had long been pawing the ground at the gate. As he rode off, he cried, laughing—

"I am now one of your family by the law of the land, for I have ſlept two nights under your roof; and if I do any wrong on the king's highway, you will be anſwerable for it!"

"That be my care, ſweet prince!" returns my father, cheerily: "May I never have a more dangerous *cuman*[1] under my roof! Return when you will, whether in company or ſteorleſs."

He was out of ſight before one could ſay Ave. To bed we went, but not to ſleep; as for myſelf, I lay awake, thinking over all the brave things I had heard, and ejaculating inwardly, "Happy they who hold thy ſtirrup and water thy horſe! happier they that carve before thee at table, and hear thy pleaſant

[1] Come-one: gueſt.

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voice!" As for Ethelfwitha, though we were in the dark, and ſhe lay long quite ſtill, I had an impreſſion that ſhe was weeping; ſo, to make ſure, I kiſſed her, and found her face quite wet. I aſked her why ſhe wept; ſhe anſwered, ſhe could not tell me, becauſe ſhe did not know herſelf. So there was an end, only I took care not to worry her by my own wakefulneſs, and lay a muſing of Prince Alfred in the ſtreets of Rome, till ſomehow, or ever I was ware, I fell on ſleep.

I muſt now mix public affairs with private, becauſe of thoſe pagans, the Danes, whom the Eaſt Anglians having with great puſillanimity received and ſet on horſeback, with leſs anxiety for the general welfare than for their own particular ſafety, they had eſtabliſhed themſelves in Northumbria. The news now came that the invaders, not content with having ſeized the city of York, were advancing upon us Mercians; and, indeed, they followed ſo cloſely on the heels of the news, that before we well wiſt they were on the move, they had taken poſſeſſion of Nottingham, which the Romans well called "the houſe of caves." For the town is ſheltered by a huge rock, perforated with numerous caverns

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and paſſages, ſome of which pierce it even to the ſummit, doubtleſs wormed in it by the people of ſome obſcure age, whom, in theſe modern times, we have altogether loſt ſight of; and there is a ſpring of water above as well as below, which makes this rock a notable ſtronghold in time of war, and doubtleſs will continue to do ſo while the world laſts. Now it fell, that ſo ſoon as the pagans had ſeized Nottingham, we were all in a ſore ſtrait; and King Buhred ſent to my father to wit what he ſhould do, and my father's counſel was, that he ſhould aſk ſuccour of Ethelred, and King Buhred ſaid no one was ſo fit to aſk or ſo likely to obtain it as my father; ſo he ſent my father to the Weſt Saxon court, and King Ethelred gave ear unto him, and promiſed to come with Alfred the prince, and the Earl of Berks, and a great army to aſſiſt the Mercians. Now, the pagans kept cloſe quarters all the winter; but ſo ſoon as ever the rivers unfroze, and the roads were practicable, or ere there was a bud on the buſhes, or a bird on the tree, we all roſe to arms. I ſay we, albe I Ethelfled only looked on with other women and children, for we all had a pretty ſtrong intereſt in the iſſue; and there were troops of men tramping

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paſt our gates daily, and glad of water and bread, and anything they could get. It was an expenſive ſeaſon to my father and mother, for King Ethelred, Prince Alfred, the Earl of Berks, and Oſric his brother, came and went to and from us all the time of the ſiege; but it was loſing ſomething to ſave all, and I am ſure we never grudged them our beſt; beſides which, as there was always ſomething going on, they made the houſe very pleaſant. Howbeit, the pagans had entrenched themſelves ſo ſtrongly in Nottingham Caſtle, that there was no diſlodging them. So peace was made with them, ſorely againſt our wills, and the Weſt Saxons drew off their forces with King Buhred's conſent, ſeeing he could not get them to ſtay any longer.

At this time, every tongue ſpoke in praiſe of Alfred the prince, now in his twentieth year, who was the darling of all hearts, and certainly of mine. This, I was going to ſay, was all in an innocent way; but I may rather aſſert that it was more than that, and did me much good; for it is of infinite value to young perſons to be admirers of ſome living excellence; and as to any vain imagination of being brought into nearer conjunction to him than I was already, I

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no more thought of it than of being married to the north ſtar; chiefly applying my mind to the reconſideration of whatever fell from his lips, which, young as he was, had moſtly ſomething wiſelike and farſighted in it. Theſe cogitations I was well able to purſue while my hands were buſy at the loom and ſpindle, and their effect was to wean me very much from puerile things, and make me thoughtful and womaniſh. Howbeit, my appearance was ſtill that of what in truth I was, a mere child. How amazed was I to hear that there was a treaty of marriage on foot between Alfred the prince and Ethelſwitha! Of ſome things, I was, from a child, very obſervant, and reflected much on them; of others, not at all. Hence it came, that had I not been told of this projected alliance, a long time might have enſued before any of its ſignals had warned me of its coming. As it was, the ſurpriſe and joy mazed me, ſo that I believe I ſhowed not myſelf ſo gladdened as in truth I was; eſpecially as the thought of loſing Ethelſwitha, when it dawned upon me, diſſolved me in a ſhower of tears. But ſhe conſoled me all ſhe could, by dilating on the bleſſedneſs of continually conſorting with ſuch a companion as

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Prince Alfred, and promiſing to have me much with her in the royal city of Reading. On my mother's ſide, as is well known, we are of royal deſcent; therefore Ethelſwitha was no ill match for a king's younger brother; and as there was no reaſon for delay, the betrothal took place ſpeedily. The Earl of Berks was one of the Prince's ſponſors; and the tranſaction, to my mind, was very intereſting and impoſing. The foſter-lean was ſettled, and the morgen-gift agreed on, which was to conſiſt of ſundry large parcels of land for three lives, with men and horſes thereunto belonging; and ſo much more land for Ethelſwitha to beſtow on her neareſt and deareſt of her own free choice, for the term of her life and after it; always providing that if ſhe were widowed, ſhe ſhould for a twelve-month keep herſelf in the peace of God and of the king, before ſhe married again.

My father, not to be outdone, promiſed to give with her two thouſand ſwine, which was thought a good deal of by thoſe whom Alfred the prince called "the ſpinning ſide," *i. e.* the female part of the houſe. Since, as every one muſt ſee, this was adding gift unto gift, and enriching that which was already of infinite

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worth; and our Saxon laws moſt wiſely provide that preſents ſhall univerſally come from the other, that is, the brydcuma's ſide, where there is anything to beſtow, if it be but a hen; ſince a man muſt think a wife little worth the having if he will not pay pretty handſomely for her, and think her a good bargain too!

However, Alfred the prince was not to be excelled in generoſity even by my father; and to the morgen-gift he added, over and above the men, horſes, and land, preſents worth the two thouſand ſwine once and again: to wit,—riñgs, bracelets, necklaces — one of them curiouſly twiſted like a ſerpent—croſſes, circlets, buckles, a golden brooch ſhaped like a fly; wimples, tunics, cyrtles of ſilk and ſamite; fine linen, mentels, cuffian and binden,[1] a mirror; a handbell; a golden footſtool; a ſilver foot-bath; fringed coverings for ſeats and high-ſettles;[2] wallhangings worked with the Siege of Troy; a bed-curtain preſenting the Landing of King Brute; a coverlet woven with golden flowers; another, for winter, of dreſſed ſkins, wondrous light and pleaſant; gold and ſilver and glaſs cups; pouches, purſes, curling-irons,

[1] Cuffs and ribbons. [2] Heah-setle.

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—in fine, everything a royal lady could need or wiſh.

Now, though the morgen-gift was not due till the day after the wedding, many of theſe valuables arrived beforehand, in large corded cheſts, to the great delectation of the "ſpinning ſide;" and I, among the reſt, had the overſight and the handling of them, which, to a girl of ſuch tender years, was no ſmall privilege. When the prince came a courting, the Earl of Berks was ofttimes in attendance on him; but, ſtill oftener, he came by himſelf, when leaſt expected, (ſave that we were always expecting him in our own hearts,) and ſometimes he would find Ethelſwitha and me walking together in the chaſe, and would come ſpringing towards us as fleetly as any hart in the foreſt. But, though he would come up to us as blythe as blythe lark, it almoſt always befel that before we had been long together, he would become as ſerious as an apoſtle, and talk of graver matters than one would have expected from ſo young a man. But whatever fell from his lips was pleaſant to Ethelſwitha, and to me Ethelfled. The wedding-day now drew nigh; and people were drawing together from various parts, to be

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preſent at the feſtivity; and there was great muſtering of men, both ſervile and freed, to beat the woods for boars and wild deer; and ſnares were laid for ſmaller game and fowls; and pits were dug to bake the meats that were not broiled nor ſodden; and hampers of pears and apples were brought from the orchards, and eels from the dike, beſides haddocks, ſkates, lampreys, lobſters, and oyſters, from the ſeas and rivers; and ſacks of fine flour, and ſyſters of honey: for there was much people to be filled.

In due courſe came the royal purveyors, to ſee if there were enow for all; and the head purveyor ſaid unto my mother, "You have enough and to ſpare of everything, if ſo be that your mead run not ſhort." But my mother ſaid, "We have enough of mead, morat, and metheglin."

Now, by reaſon of the report of the wedding ſpreading far and wide, joculators of all ſorts, or as we ſay, glee-men, began to aſſemble; ſome with bears, ſome with dancing dogs, and other ſome with jugglers' balls and inſtruments of muſic. Theſe began, beforehand, to ſet up their booths and ſtages round the green, under

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the ſkirts of the foreſt; by reaſon of whom, our chaſe, that was of late ſo retired, became rather unſafe walking. My mother would not have me go forth, unleſs under the care of Eadwulf the freedman, who was brave, faithful, and good-natured. I remember, one day taking the air with him in the woods, we came upon a ceorl cruelly maltreating a cniht of our houſehold, who by reaſon of his burthen could not requite him as he deſerved. Eadwulf, without more ado, took and bound the ceorl hand and foot with his girdle, and laid him at length on the ground. Having thus made him feel his maſterdom, he ſtood over him leiſurely, and, with a ſtern look which he knew very well how to put on, ſaid, "There thou lies: now then, what ſhall be my will of thee? If I blind thy thief's eyes, I muſt fine forty ſhillings; if I lame thy clumſy feet, I muſt fine thirty; if I deafen thee, twenty-five; if I break thy thumb, twenty; if I crop thine ears, twelve; if I take thy little finger, eleven; if thy great toe, ten; if a ſlice of thy Dane's noſe, nine; if thy fore-finger, eight; if I break thy jawbone, ſix; if one of thy ribs, three; if I knock out one of thy teeth, a ſhilling. Go to! thou's not worth

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a ſhilling unto me, the whole bundle of thee!—the cniht's beyond thy reach now, ſo go thy ways, and ne'er deal the like with a poor harmleſs fellow again."

So ſaying, he undid the girdle, and let him go free; when the ceorl, bounding out of arms' length, ſhook his fiſt at him, and grinning horribly, cried, "Thou's bound a ceorl unſinning; and, by the law of the land, ſhouldſt fine not one ſhilling, but ten, an' I could catch an' keep thee!" And ſo went off, reviling; leaving Eadwulf laughing at his impotent anger. Alfred the prince was amuſed at the tranſaction when I told him of it, and, the next time he ſaw Eadwulf, gave him a mancus.

To proceed, however, to the wedding, which, if I were to ſpin out this chapter to the length of Gildas's epiſtle, I muſt come to at laſt.

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BOOK II.

WHEN I, Ethelfleda, conſider the enormous diſproportion between the moſt aggravated and prolonged ſufferings of this preſent life and the glory that ſhall hereafter be revealed to us, it ſeems to me that were this little ſpan one entire ſpaſm or throe, we might gratefully ſo purchaſe the everlaſting bliſs. Whereas, we very well trow that this thorn-ſtrewn path is interſperſed with many ſweet flowers, and watered with many refreſhing ſtreams, and overhung with many wholeſome, unforbidden fruits; and that its courſe lies through many a deep glade and cheerful meadow, alternately in the cool ſhade and genial ſunſhine. Well, therefore, may the holy apoſtle of old remind us that our preſent afflictions, which are but for a moment, are working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

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But reflections ſuch as theſe do not, it is true, obtain their full maſterdom under the immediate preſſure of trials that wring from us ſtrong crying and tears. And ſuch being the caſe, it is no wonder that I Ethelfleda, then a mere child, ſhould have been ſorely grieved that my ſiſter's wedding dinner was ſpoilt as it was. Three days the feaſt aroſe; on the third day, Alfred the prince, clad in weeds of peace, was ſeated at table between my mother and Ethelſwitha, with a circlet of gold about his head, and a golden cup in his hand, and a ſmile and cheerful ſaying on his lips, when he ſuddenly gave a ſharp cry, that made every one's blood run cold. You may be ſure every man and woman there preſent ſtarted up or looked aghaſt, thinking he was either ſtabbed or poiſoned; but none were ſo amazed as was Ethelſwitha. They had both riſen up, and he had ſtaggered towards her a little, with his hands on her ſhoulders, his head drooping, and his face and hair ſteeped in a clammy dew. Then it was that my mother, who ſays that the ſame thing can never aſtonie her twice, did with all her compoſed ſtatelineſs cauſe him to be borne away to his chamber, attended by my father and Ethelſwitha; and did

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check and allay the univerſal panic and ferment by telling the company, truly, the prince had a ſpaſm ſhe had ſeen him taken with once before. Having thus peaceified the aſſembly, ſhe departed with all haſte to the prince's chamber; and I Ethelfled, who, if I had been leſs of a child, ſhould have remained and done the honours in her ſtead, did, by reaſon of my youth, ſteal away from the confuſed groups, and make for the ante-room of the prince's chamber, having no acceſs whereunto, I hung about for a while in the outer gallery thereof. And, looking forth of the lattice at the gaily prankt groups on the green, the pavilions fluttering with ribbons, the booths loaded with cakes, the gleemen harping and piping, archers leaning on their long bows, wreſtlers rolling on the graſs, and children ſcrambling for nuts and halfpence,[1] I wondered within myſelf, childlike, how folks could be ſo unfeeling and ſo happy.

But they were not ſo, in fact, at leaſt the elder and more thoughtful, though I wiſt it not at the time. Many were aſtonied, ſome in tears, and every one anxious for tidings of the prince's welfare. For he was greatly loved of all.

[1] Helflinge.

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At length, my mother coming forth, compoſed, but very pale, ſaid, "You here, Ethelfleda? we ſhould both be in the hall." I ſaid, "Oh, mother, what has hurt your hand? it has five wounds on it." She looked at them and began to weep, ſaying, "The print of his nails in his ſtrong pain; I marked them not till now." But ſhe wiped her eyes, and went into the hall directly; I cloſe following. I remember not much of that heavy evening, every one ſeemed out of tune. Feigned mirth is heavy; and feigned ſympathy heavier. There was a minſtrel who did us good ſervice by ſinging the doleful ſong of Beowulf, which, at the ſpeedieſt, is three hours long. The men drew about him, and many gerefas and thanes that pretended to liſten conſulted on the expediency of taking leave and ending the feaſt. My mother began to look haraſſed; ſhe whiſpered to me, "See if you can glean tidings of him;" ſo I went and found the outer gallery full of yellow torch-light and of people waiting quietly. I paſſed on through the now empty ante-chamber: Ethelſwitha came to the door when I tapped; ſhe ſaid, "He is ſleeping now, help me to diſengage my veil, and be within call in my little room."

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So I undid her veil, which had been ſent from Rome, and was as fine as goſſamer, worked all over with ſilver ſtars; and I unclaſped her golden ſlippers; and then, having advertiſed my mother of the prince's repoſe, I obeyed my ſiſter's beheſt, and betook myſelf into her little dreſſing cloſet. After a time, I heard horſes' feet ſoftly treading under the window, and looking forth, could make out, by the light of torches, my father bidding huſhed farewells to ſundry gueſts. Still looking forth, but noting nothing, I muſed of all that had befallen during the laſt three days, which ſeemed now to have no reality in them; the gay carolling and winding of horns before daydawn; the hunters and dogs diſperſed over the dewy graſs, impatient to ſtart . . . Alfred the prince ſtepping forth, a gay bridegroom from his cloſet, people huzzaing, dogs baying, horſes champing, the gay ſun ſhining over all—

Then the noontide feaſt—royal and noble gueſts arriving—minſtrels harping—rich gifts preſenting—Ethelſwitha as fair as May—tables ſpread all down the hall and along the green—others ſpread in green bowers—baked meats ſmelling everywhere—wine, ale, and cyder run-

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ning—my mother ſeeing to all, and at leiſure for everything—

The archery, the prizes, the bride on her flowery throne; the ruſtic ſports, the muſic. Supper, jeſting, complimenting, mirth growing noiſier; every one full of themſelves, and yet ever looking at the bridegroom and bride . . . all at once brought to a pauſe by that exceeding bitter cry.

In the ſtillneſs of the night, I could hear one of the guards without aſk his fellow, "What made him, wit ye, ſo cry out?" The other reſponded, "They may ſay what they liſt; I take it that he was tormented of the devil." Muſing much of this, and of the diſtinctions between chaſtiſements and temptations, I fell on ſleep or ever I was aware, with my head on my arms and a prayer on my lips; and thereupon had a dream, which was, indeed, but that of a child, yet which, for its ſingularity and the impreſſion it made upon me for a long time afterwards, I cannot refrain from here recording.

Methought I was ſtill waking, and reclining, becauſe of my wearineſs, on an oaken ſettle that ſtood over againſt the caſement, when a bright figure ſtood ſuddenly beſide me, and ſaid,

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"Ariſe up quickly!" So I did; and we paſſed through my ſiſter's chamber, where ſhe and the prince lay ſtrait and ſtiff, like two monumental figures on an altar-tomb carven out of ſtone; and her veil of ſtars, which methought ſhe ſtill wore, hung nigh unto the ſilver lamp, but burnt not. For why? A watcher ſate at their head, and another at their feet, clad in long white garments, looking holier than men, ſtronger than women, fairer than either; and they were keeping ward. So we left them, and paſſed on through the outer door, that uncloſed and folded again of itſelf; and without, in the gallery, were the lights burning dim, and men dropped aſleep after all ſorts of faſhions; but, among them here and there, ſpiritual beings in orderly array, ſilent and attent. At each door and each bed head as on we paſſed, were ſtill other vigils on guard; and ſo we paſſed on from the chief chambers to the low, narrow, and cloſe rooms and offices round about the courtyards beyond; and even here, too, amongſt the tired ſervants, were other watchers. In ſpecial, I marked two in the women's quarter leaning over a poor wench, Æthelice by name, of fearful and ſorrowful mood, and one ſaid ſoftly to the other,

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"How troubled ſhe is above meaſure!" and the other made anſwer, "Yea, but not for long." Then the firſt ſaith, "'Tis a vain terror, a mere ſhadow ſhe has ſtarted at;" and the other ſaith, "Yea, but whileas it laſteth, 'tis no mere ſhadow to her!" and ſo made a croſs on her forehead, and its furrows diſappeared. But the brighteſt watcher of them all, in appearance like to a king, ſtood by a poor eſne[1] that was driven from pillar to poſt from morning to night. This angel had a pale blue ſtar on his brow, and was ſo deep in thought, that he noted us not as we paſſed by. Then we came into the outer court, into the dark glooming ſhade and cool night air; and, methought, my guide ſaid, "Go forward, and ſee the wonders of the night." So I went forward alone, and a little but not much afraid, into the chaſe, which ſoon became a foreſt with moonlit glades. But here and everywhere I encountered ſpiritual beings, in companies or alone; ſome in inaudible diſcourſe, walking, ſtanding, or lying; ſome buſied among the leaves and flowers; and it ſeemed unto me, that every tree and herb had its gardener, though ſo ſhadowy, ſo ſilent, ſo like it in colour,

[1] Slave.

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as to be only with pain made out. None looked on me, but many looked up, and I wiſt not whether there were more of gravity or happineſs in their faces. After a while, they ſeemed all to look round with reverence at ſome one preceding me, and then quietly return to their labours; but I could ſee none before me. However, I came at length to a high wall, ſtill in the blackneſs of midnight ſhade, and in the wall a door, and in the door a key; and I heard ſome one between it and me turn that key, and that door opened and I went in. Withinſide, I could diſcern rather than ſee there was a fair garden, for I could ſmell aromatic herbs and ſweet ſpices, ſuch as are uſed by our prieſts, and the odour of ſweet flowers; and once and again my foot caught in the tendrils of creeping plants that ſeemed to grow too rankly, intermixed with weeds. A pleaſing kind of fearfulneſs overcame me in this garden, and I went on through a tangled foot-track that deſcended pretty ſteeply to the brink of a little lone pool or well, lying in the darkneſs of brightneſs. It looked ſo cool and pure, that I took ſome of the water in my hand to drink, but it taſted bitter; and I ſtooped over it to look in its clear

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depths, expecting to ſee myſelf reflected in it; but, inſtead thereof, lo! another face, not mine own! And I trembled, and awoke.

. . . There was Ethelſwitha ſtanding over me, looking haggard in the grey light of dawn; and ſhe ſaid, "Poor child, ſorrow hath made you heavy to ſlumber; ſend me my women, and go you and ſleep on your bed."

So I did as ſhe bade me, and ſank into dreamleſs ſleep; for, indeed, I was new to night watching. The buſy throng ſoon diſperſed; and the prince, making out from his leeches that they knew not what ailed him, and could give no certitude of ſpeedy recovery, gat up from his couch, ſaying, "Then I'll bear it as beſt I may." And calling me to him, he took from his veſt a little note-book full of wiſelike ſentences and ſaws of Scripture, whereon he loved to look, though he was not fluent at reading; and he bade me write therein a ſaying of Ethelſwitha's, which had much pleaſed him, —"Jeſus hurts but to heal." Having fulfilled his beheſt, I returned it unto him; when, regarding it admiringly, he ſaid, "Thou'rt the feateſt little ſcribe in Chriſtendom or Kent! I will give you my ſilver pen."

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It came to paſs after thoſe days, that our country had no reſt. Without, were fightings; within, were fears. We were tried and put to the proof every way; in aſſaults, in ſieges, in pillagings, in the burning of our houſes, in the deſtruction of our crops, in the peril of our lives. What wretchedneſs did thoſe pagans, the Danes, occaſion! yea, what wearineſs of living; yea, what difficulty to live! I have known rulers in high places as hard put to it in thoſe days for a dinner, as were the princes of Samaria during the ſiege, when an aſs's head ſold for fourſcore pieces of ſilver; and though a man were liable to the heels-fang or neck-catch if he gave his ſervants fleſhmeat on a faſt day, meat of all ſorts was ſo hard to come by, that I fancy the rule was never leſs obſerved, except upon compulſion, for all ate a hearty meal when they could. As for the lower ſort, they were fain to ſeethe pottage of ramps, creſſes, and refuſe, ſuch as, in common, only the ſwine would eat; and would hardly, I think, have refuſed ſtrong drink, though a mouſe or weaſel had died in it, in ſpite of the penalty; for what eſcaped the troops of Tema, the companies of Sheba licked up; of Hubba, that is, and Hingmar, his brother, the ſons of Lodbrog the Dane. It would ſeem they

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had come up from their place in the North, as Gog and Magog in the prophecy of Ezekiel, with all their bands, into the land of unwalled villages, and to them that were at reſt and dwelling ſafely, to take a ſpoil, and to take a prey, and to carry away ſilver, and gold, and goods, and much cattle.

In thoſe days was it feelingly to be experienced, in the words of the holy Shepherd-king, that it is better to fall into the hands of God than of man; for albeit the famine and peſtilence had been hard to bear, the war was much worſe. Theſe infidel wretches embittered the very morſel between our teeth, ſcouring the country like troops of wolves, violently taking away our flocks and feeding thereof, driving away the aſs of the fatherleſs, and taking the ox of the widow, turning the needy out of doors, and cauſing the naked to lodge without covering; inſomuch that they were wet with the ſhowers from the mountains, and conſtrained to burrow in caves and holes of the earth, or to rooſt in the foreſt for ſhelter. As for ourſelves, . . . to-day there would not be a man on the premiſes; every ſoul of them fluttered like ſparrows from corn; anon, like the ſparrows to

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their meat, they come back again, every man with his hart or roebuck, or maybe a handful of them with a wild boar; and ſo we eat and are refreſhed, till a cry comes ſooner or later of "The Danes!" Howbeit, I am running on too faſt, into the middle and latter part of the year, and muſt return for a little to the beginning of the ſpring, after my ſiſter's marriage, when the clods of the valley began to ſhow their tender blades, and the primroſe and celandine to peer forth on the banks, and jack-i'-the-hedge to ſhow his ſaucy face along the bypaths; and the jays and ſtarlings to chatter, and the wry-necks to pipe, and the rooks to utter their hoarſe notes. I had ſhot up very faſt, of late, into a mere cornſtalk, and had, I think, a little out-grown my ſtrength; add to which, I had applied ſomewhat too cloſely to a wall-hanging I was working for Ethelſwitha, ſo that I loſt my health a little, and was dull and ſorry of cheer: but my mother thought I ſhould clear up in the ſpring; howbeit, I did not. The ſubject of my hanging, which was lovely, I will here deſcribe. It was the flight into Egypt, which has always had ſomewhat about it very paſtoral and pleaſant to my mind. Joſeph and Mary would, no

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queſtion, ſhun the walled towns and populous villages, and trace their way through the moſt ſylvan and ſequeſtered paths. How pleaſant to camp out, in that warm climate, under date trees and palm trees, out of reach of the enemy, ſleeping on honeyſuckle banks, croſſing brooks, reſting in cool valleys, and dining under hedges! . . I depicted them, to the beſt of my ability, halting at one of theſe ruſtical reſting-places; the aſs turned looſe to graze, Joſeph dipping water from the ſpring, Mary ſetting out their frugal repaſt, and the Holy Child looking with grave ſerenity at two pieces of wood, fallen over one another in the form of the croſs. It was a delightſome ſubject; only that I Ethelfled wiſt not how to make the rivulet look as if it wound away into the diſtance; it would go up into the ſky. I thought about it and dreamed about it, and I think over-application to it made me ill of cheer, but my mother thought I had taken the lung-ail,[1] and dieted me on cheſtnuts and honey; but this doing me no good, ſhe made out that I was bewitched; and in the following manner.

Straying one morning in the cow paſtures,

[1] Conſumption.

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hunting for the firſt primroſes, there comes me a pretty white doe, flitting among the bare trees, and preſently trots from the brake cloſe up to my ſide. I hold out my hand, which it licks; and to my ſurpriſe I note a leathern bottle tied about its neck with a thong. On handling the ſame, I find ſome drops of ſour milk hardened about its mouth, and gueſs whoſoever hath tied it about the doe's neck muſt depend on it, ſomehow, for a ſupply. Remembering Elijah and the ravens, I tempt the doe towards the dairy, feed it with crumbs, and fill the bottle with milk; whereon it trots away as though its miſſion were fulfilled. Day after day it returns with the empty creche, which I as conſtantly repleniſh; and at length I am aviſed to track the pretty creature into the woods. Having now become friendly with me, it ambled on a little in advance, oft ſtopping for me and then trotting on again, till it had led me much further than I reckoned on, quite beyond my knowledge, and far away from home. At length I became ſcared, doubting how I ſhould find my way back, and apprehenſive of ſome ſalvage beaſt ruſhing out upon me; . . . as for the more harmleſs ſort, we ſcattered herds of

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them, right and left. All at once we reach a glooming brake, with dead men's bones whitening among the graſs, as though ſome death ſtruggle had occurred there long ago; and in the midſt a prodigious huge gnarred oak, of unaccountable age, and emboſt with moſs; in the hollow of which cowers or crouches an old woman, a gnawing of her arm, as it ſeemed to me, and muttering in a ſtrange, eldrich faſhion, "What ho, Thor! what ho, Odin! Bring back my little lad . . . Did he then? Lordſake, who'd mind a child? What wouldſt have? here's feverfew, thyme, an' honey — indeed purſlane's wanting . . . . oh! oh!" And ſeeing the doe trot up to her, ſhe claſped her ſkinny arms about its neck, undid the bottle with trembling hands, drained it as though ſhe were famiſhing, and then fell to kiſſing and hugging the doe as though ſhe were crazy, which indeed ſhe was. Her face was more like that of a man's than a woman's, more like a fiend's than either; her ſkin like old brown leather, eyes red as ferrets, with griſly hair falling over them. Nor had I a doubt, hearing her name the names of the Daniſh gods, but that ſhe was a wicca or witch; and, in my

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fearfulneſs, making a little ruſtling noiſe which caught her ears, ſhe ſtarted up, caught ſight of me, and was about to fall on me, when a ſavage growl from behind, followed by the ſpring of a huge, hairy, dark body over my head, towards her throat, ſo ſkeared me as that I fell lifeleſs to the ground. When I recovered, there was Eadwulf's great black and tawny bloodhound licking my face, and Eadwulf himſelf, with eyes as red as his hair, coming up all panting. His firſt greeting was, "Tell 'ee what, miſtreſs . . thou's led me a pretty dance; and may I be hung for a Danes' ſpy if e'er I let thee out o' ſight of us all, ſo long together again!" He'd been crying, I think; and I was ſomewhat cowed, ſo 'companied him homewards quietly enow, without ſaying, as I ſometimes did when he chode me, "Where's the harm?" or "Where's the wrong?"

Some foreſters, whom we met by the way, reported old Mulla, as they called her, to be a harmleſs maniac, whom the pagans had bereft of her wits by ſlaying her ſons; howbeit, my mother apprehended her to have ſomewhat of malign power about her; and ſeeing me much fluttered by the encounter, would have it I was

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bewitched. An aſhen bough was therefore placed over my pillow, and Gunfried, the wiſe woman, was called in. As for the doe, I regret to relate that the poor harmleſs creature was chaſed away by the ſerfs, who held it to be little better than its miſtreſs.

I had a ſecret fear of one who, like Gunfried, was reported to have ſome myſterious inſight into bodily and mental diſeaſes; which left me, however, the moment I ſaw her; for ſhe was the keeneſt, yet gentleſt and ſweeteſt looking old woman I ever ſet eyes on. She took me readily in hand, and made much of certain herbs which, to be of any good to me, I muſt gather at daydawn myſelf; to wit, white horehound, hyſſop, brownwort, parſley, rue, and groundſel; of each twenty pennyweights, ſeethed in a ſyſterful of old ale till half boiled away; of which I was to drink a neapful cold every morning faſting, and in the evening as much warm. To collect the roots and freſh leaves, ſhe and I footed it together over the early dew many a May morning; and, whether owing to the freſh air or to her medicine, I became quite ſtrong and well. Many a wiſe leſſon did ſhe teach me of the goodneſs and glory of God, as

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ſet forth in the properties of this and that herb and flower; and many a lovely tale did ſhe tell me, that carried me quite out of myſelf. On my putting it to her, one day, why the herbs, to do me any good, muſt be gathered by my own hands, ſhe, ſmiling, made anſwer,—

"There are many things which, to be of any good to you, muſt be done by yourſelf. You muſt pray for yourſelf, you muſt ſleep for yourſelf, you muſt eat for yourſelf. Can my having a full meal afford any nouriſhment to you, wit ye? We muſt all walk along the ſtrait path ourſelves, if we would wonne through the gate at the further end of it."

I have often ſince thought, how ſad to be old Mulla! how happy to be old Gunfried! There was everything about the one to make old age fearſome; there was nothing about the other to make old age otherwiſe than pleaſant.

Now, ever ſince my encounter with old Mulla, my walks had been more guarded and circumſcribed. For ſome time, ſave with Gunfried, Eadwulf, or ſome of our own women, I ſtirred not. Howbeit, as habit bates ſenſe of danger, and over-charge is onerous, I gradually became leſs watchful and watched, and made

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long progreſſes in and about the woods on foot, attended only by the wolfdog Bran. One day we met a prodigious large wolf, who had ſcarce glared on me with his red, hungry eyes, when Bran throttled him and laid him dead at my feet. I was ſo pleaſed with myſelf for being no more ſcared than I was, that it was the greateſt effort to me to refrain from bragging of it on my return home; howbeit, I abſtained, that is, for three days, leſt my walks ſhould thereon be forbidden. At the end of that time my natural ſincerity made the concealment extremely burthenſome unto me; and, as the Pſalmiſt expreſſes it, "my heart was hot within me." Howbeit, it ſeemed ſo ſtupid and ſhameful then to reveal a matter I had already made a ſecret of, that I could not bear to tell it, except to my confeſſor, to whom I mentioned it in confeſſion, but ſo ſlightly, and, as it were, in parentheſis, that I much think the old man never heard it at all. Howbeit, I got abſolution, which peaceified me at the time, though, in the end, neither that nor my old "Where's the wrong?" proved of any avail; and I refrain not from ſaying that ſince I have come to mature years, I have done penance for that little fault.

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However, the ſecret . . . (I pray thee, reader, bear awhile with my garrulity,) the ſecret, I ſay, was not to be ſo kept, whether I would or no. Previous to the appearance of the wolf, I had been knitting bluebells about Bran's neck with an azure twine; and the very next time we three went that way together—Eadwulf, Bran, and I, Bran pulled Eadwulf by the ſkirt of his ſkin hunting-frock, to the place where the dead wolf lay, and looked up in his face, as much as to aſk whether he had not done a clever thing. The moment Eadwulf ſaw it, he cries, "Hey! here's been death-work! This twine is thine, miſtreſs!—I marked it, laſt week, in thine hand. Did the wolf, then, fly at thee?" I haſtily cried, "Dear Eadwulf, it did;—but don't tell. It did me no harm, you ſee." He ſtood muſing, and looking on me awhile, the blue twine ſtill in his hand, and then delivered himſelf thus:—"'Don't tell,' thou ſays, miſtreſs? and, 'it has done thee no harm?' Has it done thee no harm, miſtreſs, if it comes to '*Don't tell?*' Why, thou's putting a rope round thine own neck, and giving me the other end of it. I've only to ſay, Wolf, or to growl a little, or to ſay, I wiſh I had a piece of twine,—to make

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thee ready to kill me! . . . I cares for thee, miſtreſs, as thou wert mine own daughter; howbeit, let it be as thou wilt. . . . An thou bids me, I'll not tell."

So, of courſe, I conſented to make no ſecret of the matter any longer; and all the better, I think, for my own heart and ſoul. Trifle as it was, I have often ſince remembered the wolf.

I know not whether I were at this time what is ordinarily thought comely. Ethelſwitha was always ſo much more prized than myſelf, that I thought as little of myſelf as the reſt did, and never much troubled the mirror. In ſooth, I was apt to take too little rather than too much thought of what I ſhould put on; and left the charge of my hair, which was now very long, entirely to my women, who ſeemed to me to ſpend a good deal more time than they needed to have done, in ſmoothing and trifling with it. But the ſenſation was pleaſant and ſoothing, and left me to purſue my own thoughts; ſo I never hurried them. My father called me his apple-bloſſom; and, one day, I heard ſome one ſay, to another one, without thinking I noted him . . . ſomewhat about . . .

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"Sweet as the breath of morning." . . 'Tis ſtrange how we remember ſuchlike things.

* * * * *

About this time, for as young as I was, my marriage with the Earl of Berks became the common report; not that I had ſeen much of him. He was a brave man, with a face like an owl; and I muſt ſay, I ſhould have preferred his younger brother. However, it was, of courſe, quite out of the queſtion to think of the latter, ſince, though noble, he had not forty hides of land, and could not ſit in the witenagemot. The earl his brother was goodhearted, but ſomewhat tedious. He ſang a ſong at the prince's wedding, that, had he not been who he was, every one would have loſt patience with. Notwithſtanding which, had we been eſpouſed, I could have found it in my heart to be unto him a good wife; but, on the whole, am thankful it went otherwiſe. My mother thought me too young; my father thought, if 'twere delayed too long, it might, in ſuch unſettled times, never come to paſs at all. Had he had his will, I Ethelfled might not now be writing this chronicle.

However, the lamentable event which de-

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prived me of my intended huſband, demands a new book,—not to ſay a better and more moving writer than my moſt contemptible ſelf. Nor is it to be ſuppoſed that I ſhould ever have attempted to preſerve, by my mean pen, events ſo worthy of a much better narrator, had it ſeemed likely that, in the much greater importance men attach to themſelves and their own ſayings and doings than to thoſe of other people, any other chronicler would addreſs himſelf to my taſk, or, if he did, be able to make half ſo much of it as I can.

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BOOK III.

ALREADY have I, Ethelfled, recorded, in my unconnected and unwiſelike faſhion,[1] that as ſoon as the winter broke up we began to be haraſſed by the Danes. In thoſe evil days, there was no ſafety to be relied on in religious houſes; for theſe relentleſs pagans cared not a whit for conſecrated ground, but pillaged and burned abbeys and monaſteries all along the coaſt. When I conſider what the ſtate of England then was, I think that, let things hereafter fall out as ill as they may, they can never be much worſe than they then were; or at leaſt, not till the end of the world, when we know that a greater conteſt will enſue between the powers of light and darkneſs than has ever yet befallen. My father,

[1] Theſe ſelf-depreciating expreſſions continually occur in the monkiſh chronicles, and are not ſo much to be taken for indications of humility as for ornamental figures of ſpeech, or what were meant for ſuch.

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with the concurrence of Alfred the prince, conveyed my mother and myſelf, with all our women, to a certain tower or ſtronghold, built by the Romans, of three ſtoreys in height, with a winding ſtair, ſuch as we have not yet ſkill to build; and belonging to the Earl of Berks. Herein we found not only the earl's mother and ſiſters, but our own dear Ethelſwitha; together with as many women and children as could be crammed within the walls; to ſay nothing of ſheep, oxen, calves, goats, and fowls, that were the neceſſary but diſagreeable companions of our confinement. Here, however, we were thankful to enſafe ourſelves; while the pagans advanced upon the royal vill of Reading, and ſcoured the country for plunder. They were attacked and beaten by the Earl of Berks in a very fierce battle at Engleſield Green, four miles from Windſor; and one of their notable and deteſtable chiefs was ſlain by the earl's own hand, to the great elation of us all; I catching the tone from his mother and ſiſters, and vainglorying with the beſt of them. Short was our triumph: four days afterwards, King Ethelred and Alfred the prince attacked them like lions at Reading, but were repulſed; and the brave earl of Berk-

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ſhire[1] was ſlain. The grief of his mother and ſiſters was endleſs; but, what was very moving, they conceived that my loſs was greater than theirs, which in verity it was not, though for company's ſake I wept very plentifully. Alfred the prince worked off his grief and rage in the beſt way poſſible for us all, by attacking the pagans four days thereafter in the moſt infuriate manner, at Aſton in Berkſhire; not ſupported on this occaſion, I am ſorry to ſay, in the way he ſhould have been, by the king his brother, who took to his prayers in a very queſtionable manner, though quoting the precedent of Moſes and the children of Amalek. Sorry ſhould I be, the head of a religious houſe, and of conſiderable reputation for my piety, to ſay any thing detrimental to the character and motives of a prince held in ſo great eſteem by the clergy; and the power which an author poſſeſſes of beſtowing untold-of celebrity or obloquy upon thoſe who come under their judgment, ſhould make him or her extremely careful how it is expreſſed; eſpecially in a matter ſo private and ſacred as prayer: but the more we hold by the real thing, the more jealous we are of its ſimu-

[1] Many counties were called ſhires before Alfred's reign.

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lation; and when King Ethelred might have been on his knees all night, and availing himſelf of many caſual opportunities afterwards, 'twas a ſhame of him, I think and will ſay, when day brake, to perſiſt in keeping in his tent, and leave his brother to bear the burthen and heat of the day. The end of it was, that as Ethelred would in no caſe come out, Alfred the prince got all the glory as well as the toil; for he winnowed the Danes like chaff, and though the ground was very diſadvantageous to him, he drove them off it completely, and purſued them towards their head quarters till dark.

I ſhall never forget the gladlike ſound of his horn winding under our window that night! He had come all acroſs the country at the price of immenſe fatigue after ſuch a day, and reached our ſtronghold a few hours before daybreak. Ethelſwitha, ſtarting from her ſleep beſide me, cries, "That's his horn!" and puts her head out. He cries from below, "Have you a corner in the tower, think you, for me?" She makes anſwer, "I hardly think we have . . . wait a little while; we will ſee;"—and, drawing in her head, haſtily commences dreſſing, and I do the ſame; concerting between us all the while, how

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we may beſtow him with any convenience. Meantime, dogs bark, men begin to wake and ſtart to their arms; and, by the time we gain the common hall, all is aſtir and in confuſion. We unſpar the door, Alfred the prince comes in, gay and yet toilworn, and in the firſt place ſtumbles over ſundry fotha of firewood that lie within the threſhold, then ſalutes Ethelſwitha, makes for the hearth, and talks and laughs while we revive the dying embers and warm ſome cakes and ale; finally, falls aſleep on a treſſel, without miſſing pallia or cortinas. We did not ſee him again of long time.

A fortnight after this, King Ethelred and Alfred the prince fought the pagans at Baſing, but were routed by them, to our great diſmay and ſorrow. As one misfortune commonly treads on the heels of another, it came to paſs that King Ethelred thereafter fell ſick, took to his bed, and died, to the great regret of the monks, in ſpite of their ſaul-ſceat.[1] They buried him in Wimborne Minſter, within the walls; which, indeed, was once a common privilege enough, though now, from a regard to common ſenſe and care for the general health, it hath become

[1] Money paid to the clergy when a death occurred.

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reſtricted to the clergy, and to perſons of notable godly lives. Much people aſſembled to accompany his exequies, and many tears were ſhed for him by the prieſts. If I ſhould alſo add, by the people, it would ſound well, but would not be the truth, which a woman of my notorious ſincerity is bound to ſpeak at all times unleſs ſhe holds her peace. Nor can I aver that his death was more regretted by myſelf than the demiſe of any crowned head muſt needs be by every loyal ſubject, which ſometimes is very little; our affections not being under our own control, but depending greatly on the conduct and character of others. This event was indeed one of thoſe diſpenſations which deſerve much more thankfulneſs than ſorrow, both from the kingdom in general and my own family in particular; for hereupon Alfred the prince became Alfred the king, and my mother's dream reſpecting the exaltation of Ethelſwitha was verified, which I mentioned at the beginning of this chronicle, and which, ſurely, no one reading with the leaſt attention can have forgotten; but if they have, they had better look back for it. That the honour and glory of this acceſſion to the throne might not puff us up with dangerous exulta-

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tion, it was wiſely ordained that the honour and glory ſhould for a time be extremely little, and that no other advantage whatever ſhould come of it, but on the contrary, haraſſing cares, deadly danger, and oppreſſive reſponſibility. For the pagans, like ſnakes that have been ſcotched but not killed, were now ſwarming round us with horrid fury; and, poſſeſſed with the idea that Alfred the king could make no head againſt them now that his brother was defunct, did abſolutely ſubſtantiate the ſame by giving him a deſperate beating at Wilton Hill. I have heard clerkly men who had ſtudied at Rome tell of ſome famous heathen prince or deity, I forget which, who every time he was thrown to the ground gathered freſh ſtrength; and thus it ſeemed to fare with Alfred the king, who, in the words of the prophet Micah, might exclaim, "Rejoice not over me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I ſhall ariſe." However, the wicked and unholy anſwer which the Danes would ſeem to make in their hearts was, "And if you do, you ſhall fall again;" ſo the only queſtion to be ſettled was, who ſhould hold out the longeſt; or, as we ſay in playing at ſcaccorum, which ſhould get the laſt move.

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This moſt tireſome warfare, which might have been ſettled as well by one trial of ſtrength as by fifty, to the great ſaving of life, trouble, time, temper, arms, and wearing apparel, continued throughout the ſummer and great part of the autumn; when ſome providential ſucceſſes accorded to Alfred the king, who by this time had learnt feelingly enough that victory came not by his own arm, ſince *that* he never ſpared, —ſome providential ſucceſſes, I ſay, enabled him to get the upper hand of the pagans for a while, and to make his own terms with them, which were, that they ſhould immediately depart out of his coaſts. And though they, with that diſregard for all good faith, and habitude of mendacity for which theſe unbaptized wretches are above all unconverted people diſtinguiſhed, only drew off to London, to enſconce themſelves there comfortably through the winter, till the fighting ſeaſon returned; yet this pauſe, this breathing time, was very refreſhing to our ſouls. As ſaith good Zacharye, we had "helth fro' oure enemyes, and fro' the honde of alle men that hatiden us;" and we had time to look about us and recover ourſelves, and lay our plans, and threſh our corn, and ſow a little wheat during

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the open weather, and even to make merry a little; but above all, to look up to heaven and pray. It ſeemed as though heaven were liſtening to us, now that the earth was ſilent, and that the voice of devout ſupplication had all the greater means of being heard. About this time, Ethelſwitha brought forth the firſt of her many children, who was called Ethelfleda, after myſelf, which I always held to be a very pleaſing compliment. Alfred the king now began to feel himſelf a king in right earneſt; and the court being more like a court than it had behoved to be for ſome time, and my long promiſed viſit to it being remembered, I was ſummoned by my good ſiſter to hold my goddaughter at the font, and ſpend the remainder of the winter in Wincheſter; which ſummons I right readily obeyed.

Having lived a removed life the greater number of my days, which were none of the longeſt, I had indulged in many a dream by day and by night of the deliciouſneſs of a court life, the which I now looked to ſee verified; but it turned out quite differently from what I had expected, ſave as regarded Ethelſwitha's affection and kindneſs. In the firſt place, Alfred the king was king after a very different ſort from King

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Ahaſuerus, of whom we are told that he gave a feaſt unto his people that laſted a hundred and fourſcore days; after which, he and his intimates did nothing but drink the ſweet and eat the fat for ſeven days more, under heall-wahrifts of blue, fine linen, and purple. Alfred the king ruled after a very different faſhion. Gladlike would he have been, ſuch was the largeneſs of his heart and his tenderneſs for the poor, to have had the wherewithal to feaſt his ſubjects, from the greateſt unto the leaſt, for a hundred and eighty days, or even for one day,—to have ſet the wine and ale running, and had an ox roaſted whole in every town and thorp. No ſuch days for laviſh expenditure had he; more the pity! Every man was thankful for a meal when he got it, without inquiring too curiouſly when he ſhould have another. Holy Neot, indeed, who was then much at court and for ever preaching to and at the king, did enlarge much on his hardneſs of heart in not relieving every caſe of diſtreſs that came in his way, and whenſoever he had an ache or pain, inſiſted that it was a judgment upon him: but I trow the good man, who could be both ſweet and bitter, rather exceeded in this matter, though with perfect good

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intention; and, had he himſelf been in the young king's place, would have found it hard to do more than he did. In truth, who ever did as much, one way and another? He was ever wakeful, ever careful, ever afoot, ever crowding into his little breathing time whatſoever he could for the benefit of his kingdom.

Howbeit, the more he deſerved men's confidence and commendation, the leſs he ſeemed to think of his own merits. He never appeared to meaſure himſelf by this and that perſon, or to think, "Of how much more worth am I than King Buhred?" or king any other; but to have ſome inviſible, indwelling ſtandard, to which he never could come up. As to his devotions, he not only attended all the daily ſervices of the church, and received the holy communion every morning, but he often aroſe by night to pray alone and unſeen. Now this courſe of life, ſo full of buſineſs, care, and forethought, had in the ſpace of a few months already made King Alfred a very different man from what he was when he kiſſed Ethelſwitha at the caſtle gate; and the inceſſant ſtrain on his mind made him look many years older than he was; ſo that I was altogether diſappointed of regaining the merry

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companion who had helped me to empty the honeypot and to tell ſtories of Morvidus and Goëmaggot. In place of this was ſome one wiſer, buſier, graver, yet far dearer to thoſe who knew him, of whom it might literally be ſaid, that happy were his men, happy were his ſervants, which ſtood continually before him, and heard the words of his mouth. As to his thirſt for knowledge, it was inſatiable. I muſt confeſs, that in all this time he had not yet found leiſure to learn to read with anything like fluency, ſave from a little Pſalter he had carried in his boſom from boyhood,[1] the words in which, from continual application to them, he knew at ſight. Howbeit, he cauſed others to read to him continually, myſelf among the reſt, whom he thought fit to commend for a pleaſant voice; and hence it cometh that there is no word, even the longeſt, that I cannot with the utmoſt certainty read off. This is an accompliſhment that Ethelſwitha would gladly have ſhared with me; however, ſhe never gave the ſame time and mind to it, having ſo many other ways of pleaſing herſelf and the king, and ſo many other duties

[1] "Clerc he was good enow, an' yet, as telleth me,
He was mo' than ten years old ere he conned his a, b, c."

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to attend to; nor is there need for a queen to read at ſight, or have ſtæfen-craft[1] like a biſhop or abbeſs. Thoſe wiſelike clercs, however, who behoved to be then or afterwards the moſt frequently exerciſed in this office, not only on account of their fluency, but of their natural and acquired wiſdom, beyond what a woman has any opportunity of aſcertaining, whether ſhe has in her or not,—were Werefrith, biſhop of Worceſter, a man moſt excellently ſkilled in holy writ, whom the king has employed to tranſlate Pope Gregory's Dialogues into Saxon;—Plegmund, archbiſhop of Canterbury, a devout and ſcholarick man;—Ethelſtan and Werewolf, the king's chaplains, both of them erudite and pious, and of great ſervice to myſelf in many things, eſpecially in acquiring the rudiments of Latin; howbeit, they were too excluſively churchlike, if an abbeſs may ſay ſo; all Mercian men;—Grimbald, provoſt of St. Omer's;—John the prieſt;—and laſt, not leaſt, the king's couſin, holy Neot, who was frequently about the court, ſcattering ſeed, as he ſaid, by the way-ſide, and trying to make the dry bones live. I remember, in ſpecial, one evening, when the king was indiſ-

[1] The art of letters.

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poſed and lying on his couch, after having been bled by advice of his leech, we heard a buſtle without, and, on aſking at the king's deſire what it meant, were told that Neot had juſt arrived. He had come, not with any pomp or retinue, but afoot, like the holy apoſtles, after preaching by the way in towns, villages, caſtles, and in the open country: as it is written, "A mule for the prieſt, a mare for the biſhop, and his own ſandalled feet for the ſaint." There was never[1] any aſſumption of ſanctity about him, but the good man had a kind of natural dignity of carriage, and a mien which carried with it the beauty of holineſs whether he would or no; add to which, he had a penetrating yet gentle look, a clear ſkin, a good eye, and ſomething in his general aſpect that was very engaging. Though he took no more heed to his looks than a man of his age and profeſſion was likely to do, yet Nature kept her own; and the goodneſs of his aſpect, which ſpare living improved rather than impaired, was the true counterpart of the diſpoſition that dwelt within. He was wont, by reaſon of his conſtant prayerfulneſs, wherever he ſate,

[1] We have no means of comparing this account with the life of Neot in the Cottonian Manuſcripts.

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unconſciouſly to hold his hands turned up on his knees; as, indeed, I have read, was the habitude of another good man, to wit, King Oſwald, who died praying for his enemies: whence the common and well known proverb, "Lord, have mercy on their ſouls! as quoth Oſwald, falling to the ground."

Holy Neot, being brought, at the king's commandment, into the royal chamber, cried, "My ſon, I am grieved to find you ill at eaſe; they have acted indiſcreetly to uſe the æder-ſeax[1] on the fourth day of the new moon, which, we have Archbiſhop Theodore's word for it, is highly dangerous. However, our prayers may avert the evil conſequences, as did thoſe of good Biſhop John in the caſe of the nun Coenberga. I had hoped to find you ſufficiently at eaſe to take pleaſure in hearing me read ſome portion of the manuſcript of the venerable Bede, which you charged me to procure for you."

"Have you brought it?" cries the king, half raiſing himſelf on his couch; "begin at once then, if it liketh you; for, if it doth not find me eaſy, it may leave me ſo. Let me look at it, and handle it a little, though I cannot read it."

[1] Vein-knife, i.e. lancet, which they uſed very clumſily.

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Thereupon Neot took the book, which was a thick one, from his veſt, and ſtepped with it to the king, who turned it over and over, and then gazed on it awhile, with much complacence; and I obſerved the contraction of his brow gradually diſappear as he did ſo; nor did it return all the while Neot was with us. So precious is the love of letters, even though it be a love without knowledge, in its power of taking us out of ourſelves.

The good Neot, after a little prefatory diſcourſing, commenced reading with great unction: the king inſiſting on his ſitting upon a ſetl at his ſide. The outſet I did not much note; there was ſomewhat, I remember, about the pains the venerable man had been at to ſecure information, orally and in writing; and much about the ſhape and ſize of this our iſland, its being ſtocked with game and fowls, grain, vines, and all manner of trees; and its being engirt with ſalt ſeas, containing ſeals, dolphins, whales, and all manner of fiſhes.

After this, came ſomewhat about the landing of Julius Cæſar; and this and that battle; and this and that hereſy; and at length the writer behoved to tell how the Britons, ſore preſt by

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their enemies the Picts and Saxons, (that's ourſelves,) ſent to Gaul to requeſt aid of good Biſhop Germanus. What followed was very ſavoury and edifying. It ſeems that it was about Lent, when the good Biſhop came over; and he took advantage of that holy ſeaſon to ply the people much with exhortations and ſermons; inſomuch that they, pricked at heart for their ungodlineſs and departure from the faith, flocked in crowds to him to be baptized. A little ruſtical church was haſtily erected of wattles and green boughs, in the midſt of the camp; the ſoldiers were foremoſt among the newly converted; and, whereas they were of late the victims of deſpondency and deſpair, they now were, to a man, animated with faith and courage. The ſcouts announcing the immediate approach of the enemy, Germanus declared to the Britons that he himſelf would be their leader. He viewed the country round about, and drew up his inexperienced troops in a hilly field, ſtill known as Maes Garmon, the field of Germain. A multitude of fierce enemies ſoon appeared, whom, as ſoon as Germanus deſcried, making for the field in orderly array, he inſtructed his men ſimultaneouſly to

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repeat his war-cry, whatever it might be, in a loud voice, directly he ſhould give the word; and, the enemy advancing ſecure-like, as thinking to take them by ſurpriſe, the biſhop thrice cried out "Hallelujah!" The hills immediately ſent back the echo of his men's voices on all ſides, which reverberated from rock to rock, and made it ſeem as though every cleft and chaſm held its ambuſh of warriors; nay, as though the very ſkies took up the cry: and the enemy, ſtruck with ſudden dread, and believing themſelves hemmed in by an innumerable multitude, fled in diſorder, caſting away their arms as they went, that they might run the lighter. Many were ſwallowed up by the river which lay acroſs their path, into which they madly caſt themſelves in their precipitate and witleſs flight; and their ſpoils were gathered up by the Britons, who remained maſters of the field, without the loſs of a ſingle man.

"I think, my ſon," ſays Neot, cloſing his book, "that, not to ſpeak irreverently, here is one of the fineſt victories related in hiſtory, ſince Jehoſhaphat went forth with his people againſt the army that was like the ſand on the

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ſea-ſhore for multitude. And yet how little we hear it talked of now! Juſt becauſe the Britons beat us, and we Saxons were beaten. May many ſuch a victory as this,—undertaken, I mean, in the ſame faith and ſpirit,—be written in our annals."

"And did the Saxons make head againſt them afterwards?" inquired the king.

"By no means," returned Neot. "The man of God, having thus won the day by faith without force, ſettled the affairs of the iſland and eſtabliſhed general tranquillity. He then left the country, followed by the bleſſings of a reconverted and grateful people. Is it not in Bede?"

"I wiſh I could beat the Danes as eaſily," quoth the king. "I believe I might cry Hallelujah to them throughout the longeſt day, without making any impreſſion on them."

"Germanus did not cry Hallelujah to *them*," returned Neot; "it was in a very different quarter, my ſon, that he looked to make an impreſſion. We read, in Chronicles, of the ſun's ruddy ſhining on pools of water being made the inſtrument of ſalvation to a people that called on their God. Another time, a great

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hoſt was diſcomfited by the ſound of a going in the tops of ſome mulberry trees."

"What was that other victory you were ſpeaking of," interrupted the king, "that was obtained by a man with a long name?"

"Jehoſhaphat, king of Judah," returned Neot. "A man of God obtained acceſs to him, and bade him have no fear of the multitude that was coming up againſt him; 'for,' quoth he, 'the quarrel is not yours, but the Lord's. To-morrow morning, go down againſt them, as they come up by the cliff:—you will find them at the end of the brook, hard by the wilderneſs—and ye ſhall have no need to fight your own battle. You have kept unto God, and He will keep unto you. Stand ſtill, when you have ſet yourſelves in array, and ye ſhall ſee what is the manner of His ſalvation, when He takes a matter in hand.' So the king did as he was bidden. In the grey of the morning, he ſtood by the way-ſide overlooking his hoſt, as it filed paſt him, twelve hundred thouſand ſtrong, in orderly array, every man hearty, faithful, and full of cheer; and, quoth he, 'Hear me now, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jeruſalem! Believe in the Lord your God, and ſo ſhall ye be eſta-

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bliſhed: believe alſo in His prophets, and ſo ſhall ye proſper.' And ſo then he placed in advance of them the ſingers unto the Lord, who went forward praiſing the beauty of holineſs; and when the enemy came in ſight, the ſingers burſt forth in a chorus that was re-echoed by twelve hundred thouſand men, 'For His mercy endureth for ever!' With one accord fled their enemies. Happy the land that has a godly king!"

"And happy the king, Jew or Chriſtian," rejoins King Alfred, "that has the Lord for his God. If I ever obtain any conſiderable advantage over theſe poor pagans, for as evil as they be, I will baptize every head of them, and ſtand ſponſor for them myſelf. I would ſooner they were converted than confounded."

* * * *

Another time, I remember the king ſaid he ſhould like his people to hear the Scriptures read in their own tongue, at every market croſs; nay, to be able to read them for themſelves, beſide their own hearths; and he thought the time might come, though not in his days, yet ſooner or later, nevertheleſs. Holy Neot and he argued this point at ſome length. If I went into their various diſcourſes at large, I ſhould

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never have done. Alſo many of his briefer and more familiar colloquies with myſelf are all in my heart, but need not to be ſet down, ſave here and there by the way. For example, I remember expreſſing unto him one day my ſurpriſe that he was up and doing, ſo many hours in the twenty-four; and ſaid,—

"How is it, my brother, that you need ſleep ſo little?"

After a moment's thought, he replied, "Perhaps, because I eat so little!"

"But how is it you need to eat ſo little?"

"Perhaps, becauſe I drink ſo little!"

"But how is it you need to drink ſo little?"

"Perhaps, becauſe I think ſo little!"

But I laughed, and ſaid, "Ah, my king, that anſwer will not ſtand."

Then he ſaid, "You have reaſon, my ſiſter. They who would have much thought, much wiſdom, much knowledge, much holineſs, muſt ſleep little, eat little, drink little, and, moreover, talk little of fooliſh matters: howbeit, to talk with ſuch men as Neot and Plegmund is nearly or quite as good as reading wiſelike books. Hold it for ſooth, Ethelfleda, that we Saxons commonly feed too heavily, women as well as

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men: and, if you would neither ſleep heavily, nor pray heavily, nor have heavy eye, heavy tongue, heavy thought, heavy heart, nor heavy foot, continue to fare as lightly as you do now. And this I ſay," added he, laughing, "not out of regard to ſaving my bread and cheeſe!"

It is not to be thought ſtrange of me, that I ſhould dwell ſomewhat at large on the hiſtory of this winter, which, for happineſs and unhappineſs, was the moſt eventful of my whole life. I read and ſtudied much under the king's chaplains, and learned by rote many long Saxon and Latin poems, both ſacred and ſecular; to wit, ſome of Bede's hymns and epigrams, Aldhelm's Acroſtic in hexameters to the Abbeſs Maxima; certain portions of his poem wherein he deſcribes and lauds forty-four female characters, who led ſingle lives; a few rhymed hexameters addreſſed to Boniface by an Anglo-Saxon lady, named Leobgitha, and chiefly remarkable, I think, for being written by a woman; ſome verſes by Cœna, which rhyme in the middle of each line—an ingenious trick, and no more; ſome much prettier and ſimpler rhymes to Aldhelm, by a pupil who loved him much, running thus,—

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"Vale, vale, fidiſſime,
Phile Chriſti chariſſime,
Quem in cordis cubiculo
Cingo amoris vinculo."

Alſo that pleaſing religious ſonnet of Alcuin's, beginning,—

"Qui cœli cupit portas intrare patentes;"

and another on death, beginning, "O mortalis homo," which I admire as much now as I did then; but, prettieſt of all, his addreſs to his cell, on leaving it for the world. I think his deſcription of his reluctance to leave that peaceful retreat—embowered in lilies and roſes of his own planting, with apple-trees in bloſſom, full of ſinging-birds, and with meadows gently ſloping to the water-ſide, ſpread with fiſhermen's nets, and ſhut in by a little wood—had ſomething to do with my falling in love with the idea of a religious life.

I alſo read the Song of Judith, the life of St. Cuthbert, and of ſundry pious women . . . a little, but not much of the Bible, which I have ſince deeply regretted I was not then put in the way of reading more of. But I read whatever my tutors choſe for me: at firſt, chiefly to pleaſe the king; and afterwards, to relieve my mind of

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certain dull thoughts and uſeleſs wiſhes, for which, indeed, there is no remedy like ſtudy.

If I were to mention all the good offers of marriage I had during this winter at court, you, whoever you may be, who are now reading this Chronicle, would certainly be ſurpriſed. In truth, I never had a grain of vanity in my compoſition; or elſe, when I have heard other women bragging among themſelves of their diſtinctions in this particular, (women profeſſing religion, too, I give you my word for it!) I ſhould have told them oftener than I have done, that, an' if I were ſo minded, I could outboaſt them all. I make it a matter of conſcience never to believe ſuch perſonal details, be they narrated never ſo modeſtly; and therefore ſhall certainly never expoſe myſelf to the humiliation of having my own word doubted, veracious as it is. There is a kind of madneſs, I wot, among a great many women in this reſpect: they ſeem quite forgetful that the whole ſum of the matter is, they have done the beſt they could for themſelves, or what they thought the beſt at the time. Every barber prates not; every maiden mates not; Ethelſwitha and the king gave me credit for being much more attached to the memory of

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the late Earl of Berks than in ſooth I was; albeit I eſteemed him far more dead, than I ever had done living; ſeeing, by the compariſon of him with all my other ſuitors, what his uncommon merit muſt have been; and as I had not thought him good or winſome enough to care much about, ſave freondlic,[1] it was probable I might look about me from Hokeday to Yule, without finding one who pleaſed me better. It may poſſibly be aſked, why I did not eſpouſe Earl Oſric, now that he had ſucceeded to his brother's eſtate and dignity? If ſuch an inquiry ſhould indeed by any poſſibility ſuggeſt itſelf, I may make anſwer that Earl Oſric had turned out quite differently from what many people had expected of him. This youth, like many another, was one of thoſe nuts that have a very indifferent kernel. Albe he could ſcarce tell his ſtæfen-row,[2] yet, by reaſon of his goodly perſon and carriage, he had, by the late King Ethelred, been prematurely made *miles*, and inveſted with a purple garment and gold-ſheathed ſword. I think Abſalom the ſon of David could not have been more conceited upon it, nor made a more pitiful uſe of his outward recommendations.

[1] Like a friend. [2] Alphabet.

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He took the lead among the youths who ſet up for poor imitations of Alfred, aping the ſemblance while they miſſed the ſubſtance, and making many a poor ſilly maiden as true an idolater in her heart, as any of our old benighted forefathers, who worſhipped wigs.[1] Howbeit, it was not by aping the trick of his ſpeech, nor the faſhion of his gait, nor yet by parting their hair evenly down the middle, and letting it diffuſe itſelf gracefully over their ſhoulders, nor yet by wearing two-forked beards, that they had any chance of being miſtaken for King Alfred. They had better have ſlept under fewer bedd-reaffes, and have left them ſooner in the morning, and have eaten leſs, and drunken leſs, and ſtudied more, and prayed more, if they had meant to be like him. However, I am waſting my time by writing about Earl Oſric, who, in ſooth, has little or nothing to do with my ſtory. Short confeſſions, few comments: ſuffice it to ſtate, that the lady he took to wife this winter was of merit commenſurate with his own, which ſome people even then thought very little. Had I Ethelfled been cognizant of the reaſons on which they grounded this opinion at the time, it

[1] Idols.

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might have ſaved me ſome diſappointment; but, —too late we cry out, "Had I wiſt there was a wolf-pit." Young people ſhould always have the truth told them quite ſimply, when circumſtances permit it; which is oftener than many old folks think. To a woman of my reflection, it appears quite evident—I ſay not whether or no it is the fruit of experience—that a young girl is extremely likely to get rid of an unfortunate affection, much ſooner than ſhe would do otherwiſe, if her good mother talk it over with her quietlike, and freondlike, without acrimony. Otherwiſe, her heart conſumes itſelf, or, if ſhe be not of a cloſe turn, ſhe ſeeketh the comfort of ſome friend, who is, perhaps, facen-leas;[1] or, it may be, of her maid.

If it be aſked, where was my mother at this time? I reply, that ſhe had been ſummoned home ſomewhat ſuddenly, about Yule-tide, to nurſe my father in the foot-ail;[2] and that during her previous ſojourn at the court, ſhe had been much more occupied about Ethelſwitha's infant than about her own youngeſt daughter. And hereupon I, the abbeſs of a religious houſe, muſt and will ſay what will doubtleſs be highly

[1] Deceitful; a maker of lies. [2] Gout.

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offenſive to every married woman who comes to hear of it, and this for the ſake of the younger perſons of my own ſex, who may, it is juſt poſſible, benefit by it, while I ſhall reap nothing but obloquy. . . . . I, Ethelfled, declare and aver, that babies are all very well in their place, which is the cradle; but that innumerable mothers do, in toying with them and inceſſantly ſuperviſing them, notoriouſly neglect their duty to their older daughters, their growing and juſt grown up girls, to whom no one elſe can ſupply their place; whereas their place in the nurſery may be very well filled by the foſter mother and maids of the chamber.

Had my wiſe and good mother been at hand and at leiſure to ſee whither the courſe I was taking would end, I Ethelfled might have been ſpared the ſhedding of ſome ſalt tears; as it befel, I took my own path, ſeeing my way very little before me; refuſing this good match and the other, till, one day, I was a little ſtunned by hearing my ſiſter, in reply to the expreſſed ſurpriſe of the noble lady Adeleve that the lady Ethelfleda did not marry, quite compoſedly make anſwer that I preferred going into a nunnery. It had never ſtruck me before that I muſt do either the

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one or the other, and it took me ſo by ſurpriſe that I had not a word to proffer, but I could think of nothing elſe all the following night. I had of late taken much pleaſure in reading of the good people recorded in Bede, their pious lives and almſdeeds, and their being from time to time carried up to heaven in a trail of glory, with celeſtial ſinging, like holy Chad, or like that Kentiſh maid who heard the angels ſay one to another, "We have come to fetch the little gold piece." I had muſed how Erkengota, niece of the abbeſs of Brie, lay a dying, when thoſe who were nurſing her heard the ſound as it were of a great unſeen multitude entering the monaſtery, and ſoon after, juſt as ſhe breathed her laſt, heard moſt tranſporting muſic aſcending into the air and gradually dying away; and how, on looking out, they perceived, or thought they perceived, the night to be lighter than common, with ſomewhat of a milky path fading away. Alſo, of that ſweet nun, called Edith, in the monaſtery of Barking, that was ſo beloved by a little boy, who, by reaſon of his tender age, was bred up among the ſiſters. He, dying of the plague, eagerly called out thrice, when in the article of death, "Edith! Edith! Edith!"

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which convinced all who heard it that her time would be ſhort; and, in truth, ſhe ſickened out of hand, and dying the ſame day, followed the little innocent who had called her, into the heavenly country. Alſo, how another ſiſter of the ſame community called to thoſe about her deathbed to put out the light; and, on their neglecting to do ſo, ſaid unto them, "Well I wis you think me raving, but I can tell you that I ſee this houſe filled with ſo glorious and heavenly a beam, that your candle, in compariſon with it, is but darkneſs!" And how another, named Tortgith, who for nine years had been ſore beſted, had a viſion of a woman wrapped in a fair linen cloth, drawn gently upwards by golden cords; which was explained ſoon after by the good abbeſs dying.

Theſe and ſuch-like tales, I ſay, I had muſed over and delighted in, and believed with a heartier faith than, perhaps, I can boaſt now; and ſometimes, when vexed or ſaddened by this or that croſs, I had bethought me, how good and bleſſed a thing it muſt be to be ſhut in and hidden away from a naughty world, and to be in peace and quietneſs for ever. But this had been all in a vague and general way; and betokened

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more impatience of my preſent yoke, than capability or vocation for one far heavier; therefore, when the alternative was ſudden-like preſented to me in all its awfulneſs, it is little wonder that I lay awake, as I have already ſaid, all the night. What ſtung me was, that Ethelſwitha ſhould appear to think the matter ſo ſimple, and have ſo quietly ſettled it in her mind to be contented therewith. I wondered whether it were the ſame with Alfred the king, or whether he would be very much ſurpriſed and grieved to hear ſuch a thing mentioned. It occurred to me whether I ſhould not at once ſhow I had a mind of my own, by quietly conſenting to eſpouſe one of my many ſuitors; but, on reviewing them in my mind, one after another, it appeared to me that no conventual retirement could be ſo nauſeous as to paſs the remainder of my days with any one of them; beſides which, I had, with the openneſs of an honourable woman, made each of them perceive himſelf to be ſo diſagreeable to me, as that I could not now, with any ſhow of conſiſtency, call them back. Theſe reflections occaſioned my pillow to be wetted with ſome hot tears; and I ended, when day brake, by reſolving to truſt a little longer to what chance

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might bring forth, in the hope that ſome foreign prince or other, equal to all I thought a huſband ought to be, might yet appear at court. Juſt to ſee, however, how Alfred the king would take it, I contrived in a day or two, as if by accident, to let fall the words, "When I go into a nunnery." To my no ſmall mortification, he gravely and calmly anſwered, "If ſuch be indeed your final reſolution, Ethelfleda, I can have nothing, certainly, to ſay againſt it; but, on the contrary, ſhould recommend your withdrawing a little more from the ſecular pleaſures which muſt needs be diſtaſteful as well as hurtful to you, and to take all the means in your power, which at preſent are very great, to purſue thoſe ſtudies and duties which will, hereafter, make the ſum of your happineſs. Tell me, however, are you quite aviſed, young as you are, of having choſen well, and of knowing your own mind? Our laws are very gentle towards women, and very careful of them—they may poſſeſs, inherit, and tranſmit their lands at their own free will; they may ſue in courts of juſtice; they may ſit in the Witena-Gemot and Shire-Gemot; they may marry at their own choice after fourteen, and they can only be devoted to recluſe lives at

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their own free will. But, if our laws render them independent of their friends' control, our cuſtoms give them the benefit of their friends' advice and judgment. Do nothing precipitate, my ſiſter. . . . . Are you quite ſure of your own mind in this matter?"

But I wiped away a tear, and would not ſay.

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BOOK IV.

It came to paſs after Yule, that there ſet in a grievous froſt. Before the froſt, there was a heavy fall of ſnow, under which many men, women, and huts lay yburied. Is it not written in the annals of Alfred the king?[1] Thereupon came forth the wolves, ſtepping ſo warily in each other's foot-marks, that on the ſnow could be ſeen but the track of one. They trotted along the ſkirts of the foreſts, bounded acroſs the narrow roads, without leaving a ſingle footprint, and made for lone houſes and ſcattered thorps. Then they ſtopped, liſtened, and ſnuffed the air. The ſhepherds, watching their flocks by night, could only keep them off by great fires. If they were heavy to ſleep, and ſuffered their fires to decay, the wolves fell on them, and deſtroyed

[1] Some unuſually hard winters, about this time, are recorded.

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them with their flocks. What, to them, were pens? they would leap over walls eight feet high. If they found horſes within their ſheds, they would attack them on the haunches; if oxen in their ſtraw-yards, they flew at their throats. They ravened on many men, women, and children. They dug up the dead in many churchyards. They made no noiſe. If one of their young ones emitted a cry, they bit him; they dragged him by the tail, till he learned to hold his peace. When they had gorged themſelves, and were filled, they retreated as they came, with one ear thrown backward, one in advance, their muzzles low, their eyes burning like fire, their buſhy tails obliterating their traces as they ſwept the ground. When they got to the wood-ſide, they would face about and howl like Danes. "Sayth the cub, I am now under cover."

Sometimes one wolf would come in advance, and give a whining cry outſide the ſtakes to tempt one of the hundas[1] to come forth. Oft they ſuſpected the artifice; at other times a dog would be unable to reſtrain himſelf from ſpringing over the pales. Then there would enſue a

[1] Hounds.

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dreadful yell, and he would be rent in pieces of all the pack.

Alfred the king hunted much, both in autumn and winter. He paid a penny for every wolf's brush. He was glad to put money in poor men's pouches, the times were ſo bad. He hunted harts, boars, reindeer, and now and then a bear. Thoſe who were cræft-like in ſnaring deer in nets, he ſometimes rewarded with a horſe or a bracelet. Every man, ſave on Sundays, might hunt in the woods, if ſo be he interfered not with the king's hunting. Thus many of the poor were fed. When the ground became hard and the ſcent did not lie, much ſmall game was taken by the hand, ſtupid with the cold. Alſo the king diſtributed many buſhels of grain, many ambra of malt, many wagon-loads of billets and twigs, that the people might be both warmed and fed. Nevertheleſs, as will always be the caſe, ſome were diſſatisfied. And of theſe, certain complained unto Neot that they were neglected in the daily miniſtrations. Then Neot came and ſtood before the king; and his righteous face was red, and, ſaith Neot, "Why do you wrap yourſelf in your miſconduct? why are you powerful but in injuſtice? You

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have been exalted, but you ſhall not continue: you ſhall be bruiſed like the ears of wheat. Where will then be your pride? If that is not then brought low enough, it ſoon ſhall be. You ſhall be deprived of that very dignity, whoſe powers you ſo much abuſe."

Saith the king, "My father, what words are theſe which proceed out of your mouth? Whoſe ox have I taken? what widow have I oppreſſed? or what poor man have I ground to powder? My purſe is not bottomleſs; I wiſh it were fuller; howbeit, in this matter you ſeem miſinformed."

Quoth Neot, "I have not been miſinformed. There are certain, O king, that have been neglected in the daily miniſtrations. You lie ſoft, and you eat as much as it liketh you, and you delight yourſelf in being a king, and hear not the cry of them that have no helper. Therefore look to it, or believe in my word, that you ſhall be deprived of that kingdom in which you are ſwelling, hunted from one covert to another like a fox or a hare. Howbeit, if you repent in time, you ſhall find mercy." Thereunto the king made no anſwer, and Neot withdrew himſelf from him, warm in his wrath.

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As the cold increaſed, trees were ſplit by it; bread muſt be thawed and chopped ere it could be eaten; water yfroze in the outpouring, and ſtood on end like an icicle; fiſh froze in the rivers; the warm blood froze in our veins.

We of the ſpinning-ſide kept houſe. At night, there was much feaſting. The harp went round, and every man ſang his lay or told his tale. Some told of bear hunts and boar hunts; ſome of wolves and foxes that talked; and of ſerpents that could feign to be human, and ſlip in and out of their ſkins. Alſo of gold-hunters, in ſome ſtrange land, that journey on camels to a place where gold is dug by ants as big as dogs, with feet like unto the feet of graſshoppers. The men leave the camels for the ants to devour, and, while they are at their feaſt, the men take the gold. Alſo of the pepper-gatherers, who find the pepper guarded by ſerpents, that muſt be ſcared from it by fire; and thus the pepper becomes black. Is it not written in a book? Therefore it muſt needs be true.

Elfric the thegn ſang a ſong, which became very popular at court, and even in the ſtreets. He had it of Tinne the Corniſhman, ſon of Tredulf of Tintagel; of whom we ſpeak in the

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proverb, "As ſweet as one of the ſongs of Tinne." The ſubſtance of it was this:—

"In the days of old judge Eli, came king Brute unto our ſhores. He was grandſon of Aſcanius, Eneas' only ſon. Then our land was full of bears, of beavers, and of boars. Then men multiplied among us till the iſland was o'errun. They had need of many things, I wis, we cannot bear to lack. But theſe poor ſwains ne'er miſſed them, ſo hardly were they bred. They had cattle, but no money. They were uſed their corn to ſtack i' the ear, and only threſhed out juſt ſufficient for their ſtead. In courſe of time came Cæſar, to rob them of their land. What! had he not already ſubdued lands enow? He muſt come and plant his ſtandard upon our yellow ſtrand! But the poor, untutored Britons ruſhed boldly on the foe. Yea, right into the water they ruſhed with one accord, and gave their naked bodies to the arrow and the ſword. One mind there was among them; they drove him to the main. And what thoſe Britons then did, may we not do again? Up, cnihts![1] and with one heart! Deſtruction to the Dane!"

[1] Lads.

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No man told his tale and ſung his lay better than Alfred the king. Alſo his proverbs and pithy ſayings, are they not in everybody's mouth? There is no need, I wis, to write them in a book. Peradventure many of them will be in uſe, when it ſhall be forgotten who made them.

The Prince of Weſſex came to court. He, too, ſued for my hand; but he was ceorl-like,[1] and had no ſtæfen-craft. I heard him tell the king that I ſtarted off at the firſt word, like a young deer from a gad-fly.

When it came to be currently reported that I was minded to profeſs, the prieſts came about me like bees; while my lovers and ſuitors fell off from me, as though I were too holy to come nigh. The two chaplains aſcribed my call to themſelves, and nailed me down to it, or ever I well wiſt whether I had one or not. For this cauſe, and for none other, I have never, even unto this day, felt unto them quite freond-like. Whereas I had overmuch made a ſhow of ſetting light by the world, perhaps to give a little pain (which he never felt) unto one who lived in it, I was now ſore beſted to find me taken at my

[1] Vulgar.

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word, and thereon I ſhed many ſalt tears. The prieſts ſaid, my ghoſtly enemy, witting his time was ſhort, was having a laſt ſtruggle with me, and that God loved a reluctant ſacrifice. If ſo, I wis He loved mine. They made me think it true; and, albeit Ethelſwitha put it to me, even weeping, whether I were prepared for all that lay before me, and told me ſundry tales of nuns' lives I did not then believe, I ſtill held on, but I was ſore betoſt. Then began I to queſtion in mine heart why one woman ſhould be a queen, and another a nun? Howbeit, whenas theſe moodful thoughts had reached their higheſt, and I was nigh minded to forego the cloiſter, Eadwulf arrived with horſes and with ſpearmen to carry me home, becauſe that my mother lay ſick, and, as it ſeemed, a dying.

There is no need for me Ethelfled to rehearſe in detail the ſeveral graces of this my bleſſed mother; ſhe being renowned throughout the length of Mercia and the breadth of it for her prayerfulneſs and largeneſs of heart. When the eye ſaw her, the heart bleſſed her: on the tongues of the poor was her praiſe. When I heard how ſhe lay ſick, I was pricked at the heart to think how I had of late been trifling

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with heaven; and I ſtole into the chapel a little before matins, and vowed a vow, that if it would pleaſe the Lord to heal my bleſſed mother, I would wholly dedicate myſelf a *willing* ſervant to the Lord.

Now, becauſe my mother's need was urgent, I tarried little in ſetting forth. Eadwulf rode beſide my bridle, full ſilent, till we had cleared the firſt long foreſt; for a bear had been tracked, albe we thought it muſt be a tame one ſcaped from a bear-warden, they were ſo ſeldom known in thoſe parts. When we reached the firſt down he ſpake ere I ſpake unto him, which was unmannerlike, but well meant; and ſaith Eadwulf, "Of a verity, miſtreſs, my meowla[1] will be fain to weep at what is held for ſooth in the great city. . . . I heard it, for as ſhort a time as I tarried. Oh, lady, lady, every ſtroke of the muffled bell that ſhall toll for thee, will knell in our hearts! How little thou witteſt of what lies on the hither and thither ſide of that wall of ſeparation! 'Ye ſee me but half,' quo' the gate-poſt."

But I bade him hold his peace; ſo he fell back, like a chidden hound. Then I relented, and ſought news of my mother, and held ſpeech with

[1] Familiar word for wife.

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him of long time. Then we rode till nightfall, moſtly in ſilence, and tarried at a thane's houſe; and we journeyed all the next two days.

Now when I ſaw my mother's deathful face, I repented not my vow, but renewed it full fervently; and thereafter ſhe began to amend. But before I could ſee of this travail of my ſoul, I had a more immediate ſavour and reliſh of peace than I had known of long time. My mother, deeming herſelf at point to die, made her will; I ſupporting her in mine arms all the time; and, albe her proviſions were needleſs that ſeaſon, I marvelled at and loved her for her great heart therein made manifeſt. For, not alone deviſed ſhe her morgen-gift unto my father, and this and that baſin and challice to this and that church, and ſuch and ſuch heall wahrifts and ſetl hragel[1] to Ethelſwitha, and ſo many ſcencing cuppan[2] and ſilver diſhes to the king, beſides tokens of remembrance to this and that friend, as buffalo horns, cups of bone, and brazen diſhes; but ſhe took heed to the eldeſt of her ſlaves; as on this wiſe—Let Ebba be freed, on condition ſhe abide with my daughter Ethelfleda; and let Urfried be freed, and go whitherſoever ſhe liſteth;

[1] Hall-hangings and ſeat-covers. [2] Drinking-cups.

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Wynric and his wife, and Spror; and let the ſiſter of Tidulf be freed. Wite-theows[1] ſhe had none to releaſe; my bleſſed mother! After this ſhe waſhed, and cauſed herſelf to be clad in long white funeral garments; then ſhe confeſſed, and received the holy communion; ſo that nothing remained but for us to place her, after her deceaſe, juſt as ſhe was, in her coffin. Then ſhe, with fatigue overwhelmed, fell back upon her bolſter; and we with hoppscytan[2] and a goat-ſkin covering warmly covered her o'er; and her breaths grew deep and far between, as the ſighs of expiring people commonly do; but, in place of their growing yet fewer and more faint, ſhe began anon to breathe more peaceful like, and preſently fell into a deep ſleep. Now I Ethelfled diſmiſſed all her women ſave one. A great wax candle in a heavy candleſtick burned at the foot of the bed. I lay down beſide my mother, whileas Ebba fed the decaying fire with turf: and I kept ſtaring at the candle, and thinking my mother's inward life was brighter, and I muſed of the dying nun at Barking that bade them extinguiſh the taper; and or ever I wiſt, I fell on ſlumber, with the tears, I believe, yet on my

[1] Penal ſlaves. [2] Sheets.

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cheek. Now, in this my ſleep or trance, a dream was vouchſafed me,[1] not like that which cauſed Eliphaz the Temanite to fall a trembling, but that came unto my weary ſoul with I know not what to ſay of peaceful and refreſhing, like unto the cool night air after a hot day, or the ſoothing of muſic that yet hath no diſtinct ſound. Me-ſeemed to take up mine old dream in my ſiſter's cloſet; in the lonelineſs and darkneſs of that locked-up garden, with its tangled weeds and ſweet-ſmelling herbs growing unſeen, all about me; and meſeemed to be ſtanding on the brink of that deep little pool. And I heard the key turn in the gate, and ſome one come in and lock it again and deſcend and ſtand by the pool; but mine eyes ſaw him not. Then a ſenſe of awe overcame me, and a pleaſing dread overſhadowed me; yet I drew nigher unto him in place of falling back; for I felt I was helpleſs, and here was ſome one that could help: ſorry-ful, and here was one pitied ſorrow: weary, and here was one could give me reſt: and, leaning over the pool, I ſaw therein what I could not ſee in its own ſubſtance . . the face of Jeſus!

Thereupon my mother woke me with a kiſs,

[1] "Dreams likewiſe" (among the Anglo-Saxons) "had their regular interpretations and applications."—SHARON TURNER.

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and ſayeth, "Ethelfleda, you are weeping in your ſleep—are you in trouble, love?" But I ſaid, "Oh no;" and ſhe lay quiet, and methought, ſlept again, but ſhe did not. Anon ſhe ſaith in a huſhed, calmful voice, "I have ſlept and am refreſhed . . . I think my life is given unto your prayers . . . for I wis thou haſt prayed for me, my daughter." I ſaid, "Oh yes, my mother." Then ſhe began, ever and anon, to queſtion me of Ethelſwitha, and likewiſe of myſelf. Her queſtions were very loving, but ſearching; and or ere I was aware, I felt mine heart drawn out unto her, and poſſeſſed her of every ſorrow that lay in it. Her dear arm lay acroſs me: I ſeem to feel it now. After long ſilence, "Child," quoth ſhe, "you have been hardly entreated; and the more ſo that there is nothing whereon for us to take the fæhth.[1] Were I thy father or thy brother, I might make a quarrel of it; but perhaps it is better as it is; for to what good could we ſtir in the matter? Words and looks are oft but the fruit of a falſe heart: we may value a man's life at his *were*,[2] but there is neither were nor wite for mind's peace. The owner of a miſchievous dog may be fined; but they that bite and devour their

[1] Deadly feud.

[2] The pecuniary fine for homicide.

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own kind go ſac-leſs." Then ſaid I, "Oh my mother, let us keep the grief hidden between you and me. In my bitterneſs I vowed a vow unto the Lord, and now keep it I muſt." Then ſaith ſhe, "Oh child, what haſt thou done? to ſpeak unadviſedly with thy lips? The vow of a young maid in her father's houſe, vowed in mere ſorrow of heart, need not ſtand." Then ſaid I, "Oh my mother, I renewed it or ever I left the royal city. I went into the chapel juſt before matins, and kneeled upon my knees, and vowed that if your life ſhould be lent unto us yet a ſeaſon longer, I would wholly give myſelf unto the Lord." Then ſhe ſayeth, "I ſuppoſe ſuch a vow as that muſt ſtand." And we both wept ſore.

All this time, Ebba ſlumbered and ſlept; but now ſhe awoke and renewed the bright beaming flame; and we two held our peace. Thereafter, my bleſſed mother, who was very weak, ſlept again; and I lay long awake, but ſlept at laſt; and when I ſlept, it was heavily and with no dream.

Whenas I awoke, I felt weary; and the cold, grey morning light was ſtealing in, and the air of the chamber was at once cloſe and chill. But

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my bleſſed mother was ſtill aſleep peaceful-like, and the two furrows had yfled that were on her brow; and the words came into my mind, "She ſhall ſee of the travail of her ſoul, and be ſatiſfied." Ebba was ſeeking, full ſtealthful, to revive the embers; and I lay quite awake, but ſtill; feeling as though ſome great wrench had torn the quick fleſh, bleeding, from the bone; and as if a ſtrong hand had turned my ſoul round about, from all the things wherein it had greatly delighted, towards a new proſpect, with a ſtrait path, cloſely hedged, running on to a thick cloud beyond. There was ſomewhat untruthlike[1] in it all; but my mother's bettering was ſoothfæſt enough.

About high noon, one of her women came in, and ſaid the holy Neot had arrived with a token for her from the queen; having ridden all the way, to make the more ſpeed. He was admitted ſtrait; for my mother delighted greatly in his miniſtrations; and, at this preſent, her ſoul was as ſubdued as a weaned child. He tarried with her long time; prayed for her; ſaid how ſhort and vain was life, how bleſſed was heaven, what exceeding love our Saviour had ſhown in dying

[1] Unſoothfæſt.

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for us: and every word he ſpake, my mother's ſoul and mine drank up as dry and thirſty land drinketh up water, that ſoon indeed diſappears from the ſurface, but only to ſink down into it and make it fruitful.

My mother being at length heavy to ſleep, the good Neot withdrew into another chamber; beckoning with the hand, that I ſhould follow him. Then ſought he more particular news of my mother, to bear unto Ethelſwitha, and enquired of me when ſhe began to amend. Alſo he ſpake words of peace unto myſelf, ſaying how great a bleſſing it was for my mother to have ſo good a daughter by her to abide at home and be her ſtay; and that my miſſion of uſefulneſs, if leſs glorious in the ſight of the world than that of my ſiſter, was not ſo in the ſight of God, who ſeeth not as man ſeeth. Thereupon my tears began to flow; and I did the holy man to wit how much too well he thought of me, and how I had been ſore let in running the race that was ſet before me; but that now I began to ſee my way plainer; only I diſtruſted my ſtrength to hold on to the end, and ſhould be thankful to him for his prayers. Theſe he promiſed me; and he went on to ſpeak of things heavenly with ſuch ſweet-

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neſs, that I was drawn on to tell him of all my little difficulties—my *great* difficulties would be the truer word . . . . and of my dream overnight; and I aſked him if he thought there were anything in it. Thereon he ſmiled a little; which I then thought, and think now, ſo good a man ſhould not have done; for was it not unto me a ſerious matter? Young perſons may aſk unwiſely queſtions; but, ſo be they are docile and anxious to be ſet right, they ſhould be treated with gravity and judgment. Howbeit, the good Neot ſate ſilent for a ſeaſon, wrapped within himſelf, and then ſaid, "There are ſundry ways in the which divine inſtruction and comfort may be and have been imparted: and we know that viſions have aforetime been vouchſafed unto believers, to direct and ſtrengthen them in their need. Doubt not, therefore, my daughter, but freely believe, that this dream of thine, even if the offspring of thy foregone turn of thought, hath ſomething of profitable and ſpiritual in it. Why ſhouldeſt thou have felt that great delight in the unſeen preſence of Jeſus, if thou wert not one of His little flock? His ſheep know His voice, but it only ſcares the goats. Why ſhould you have heard His voice in the garden without

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being afraid, if you had been eating forbidden fruit, and would not have Him know it? Your ſoul is, in ſooth, His garden; full of weeds, no queſtion, and of unpruned flowers and unripened fruits; but we know what thoſe fruits are: love, joy, peace; longſuffering, gentleneſs, goodneſs; faith, meekneſs, temperance. If we are aware that theſe fruits have taken root in us, and are growing, however imperfectly, we can, with humble aſſurance, invite the Maſter of the garden to come and behold His pleaſant fruits; and we muſt not take it amiſs if He pruneth pretty freely thoſe branches which are running to waſte, ſince He only ſo doth that they may bring forth more abundantly. As concerning your deep ſtill well . . . the heart is, we know, a well of ſweet water or bitter: as bitter as Marah till the Lord caſts in the righteous branch. Then it obtains His own ſweetneſs; and oh! well for us, my daughter, when He comes down by the ſecret path that no man knoweth, and, taking us at unawares, finds His own image reflected in the ſhady pool! May He ſo find it with each of us, ſo often, that His frequent ſteps ſhall wear a little track, known only to Him and to us!"

Furthermore he ſaid, "What manner of jour-

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ney hadſt thou, my daughter?" I ſaid the way was long, and cold, and rough, and in many parts dangerous. We tracked a bear, and feared the wolves, and had much ado to croſs the rivers, which were half thawed, half frozen; howbeit, I ſcarce noted all the terrors of the way, I ſo longed to ſee my mother's face. As ſoon as I reached my father's houſe, all my perils, all my panics I forgot. "Thus will it be," quoth he, "in the heavenly country, when you reach your Father's houſe. You will ſcarce note the preſent perils of the way, if you long to look Jeſus in the face."

Then he told me the following parable. "A little girl was once ſent to market with a baſket of eggs. On her return ſhe found the floods had riſen and the bridge was carried away. While ſhe ſtood weeping beſide the torrent, a tall pine ſnapped in twain, and fell acroſs from one bank to the other. Thereupon ſuddenly appeared unto her a man of moſt beautiful countenance, who ſaid, 'Child, why weepeſt thou? what ſeekeſt thou?' She ſaid, 'Oh, my lord, the bridge is broken, and I cannot reach my father's houſe.' The ſtranger ſaith, 'A pine has fallen from ſide to ſide, thou mayſt croſs on

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that.' The child ſaith, 'Sir, the ſtream is deep, and flowing very faſt; my head will ſpin, and I ſhall fall in.' The ſtranger ſaith, 'Give me thine hand; as long as thou holdeſt unto me, I will uphold thee. Look ſtedfaſtly on my face, look neither to the right nor to the left, and I will lead thee acroſs.' The child ſtretched forth her hand, and looked ſtedfaſtly in his face, which waxed more and more beautiful every moment; and though ſhe was ſtrongly tempted, when ſhe heard the waters raging vehemently, to look now to the right ſide, now to the left, ſhe never did; and they won ſafe acroſs."

Furthermore he ſaid, That one reaſon which inclined him to think that my dream in my ſiſter's cloſet had come, not from within but from without, directed by ſome ſuperior intelligence, was that ſome of the ideas in it were unchildlike, and would not have originated with myſelf. What ſhould I have known of the heart's bitterneſs, or of the ſpiritual conflicts of the poor maid? Thereat, I interrupted him, and ſaid I had remembered, afterwards, having heard Ebba ſcoffing at the terrors of Æthelice, in the hearing of my mother, and calling them vain ſhadows; whereon my mother had checked

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her by ſaying that whileas they laſted, they were no vain ſhadows to her. Good Neot fell a muſing of this; and preſently ſaid, that if all were as ingenuous as myſelf, and regarded not the diſpelling of things ſeemingly marvellous by telling the exact truth, he wiſt that ſeveral things would be to be accounted for that now paſſed for miracles, and by their puerility and inconſequence brought diſcredit on thoſe that were truly ſuch.

He added, he had once had a dream that had much ſtrengthened and comforted him, albe it was not ſo pretty as mine: peradventure becauſe he was neither young nor pretty himſelf. He was tending of a ſick friend, of whoſe ſtate of grace he was by no means certain; and during his night-watch, when he ought to have been alert, he, like the poor, diſtreſſed diſciples who ſo loved their maſter, fell a ſleeping for ſorrow. Thereon, he fancied he ſaw his friend trying to ſcale a ladder reſting againſt ſomething out of ſight, yburied in clouds; and ſeeing his friend like to fall, as though blind and dizzy, he cried out with all his might to him to hold on; and would have ſtretched forth his own hand to ſave him, but had no power. Juſt as he thought his

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friend was going to fall into perdition, and could hardly endure to watch him, a hand from the cloud above was put forth and drew him ſafely up. "And albe," quoth Neot, "you might ſay that this viſion was no other than the fruit of mine own previous and anxious thought, I affirm to thee, daughter, that it comforted me long afterwards."

In diſcourſe like this, the good Neot quite took away, for that ſeaſon, all lingering bitterneſs and reluctance from mine heart; and, continuing his communion with me from time to time, he led me onwards, ſtep by ſtep, and helped me here and there over rugged places, ſo that I never ſtumbled nor drew back. His great engine was the love of Jeſus; not mine for him, but His for me, which indeed did as it were conſtrain mine own. And when other matters called my good teacher away, I found that albeit I had loſt a ſtay I much miſſed, I could now with timid ſteps walk alone. One good I was to him indebted, was the method of life I now had formed, which ſo filled all my time that I had no leiſure for mod-ſeocneſſe.[1] Alfred the king, who by reaſon of the pagans having conveyed themſelves into the north ſo ſoon as the

[1] Mood-ſickneſs: ſickneſs of mind.

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froſt brake up, had yet a lengthened ſeaſon for bringing to paſs ſuch things as liked him,[1] and ſetting aſide ſuch things as liked him not, was zealouſly minded to promote the ſtæfencræft as well of clercs as lah-men. For whereas of late there had been few eccleſiaſtics below the rank of biſceopa, on this ſide the Humber, who underſtood the ſervice of the church, or could turn Latin into Engliſh, he was purpoſed that, if not all the ceoal-like, at leaſt all the ranclike throughout the realm ſhould have ſome knowledge of letters; many men who ſhould know better, being obliged, as at this time, to ſign their wills with the ſign of the croſs, *pro ignorantia literarum.* Well hath he, the good king, written of later time, concerning the ſadneſs of a ſoul benighted:

> Oh! in how grim,
> In how bottomleſs a pit,
> Laboureth the bedarken'd mind,
> When it the ſtormy
> Tempeſts beat
> Of the world's buſineſs!

Foraſmuch as *then* it is we find ourſelves at fault, and too late lament our ignorance. And again;

[1] "I, Alfred, cyning, have gathered together many of thoſe things our fathers held, which liked me; and have thrown aſide many of thoſe which liked me not."—Exordium to Alfred's Laws.

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Oh! thou Creator
Of the pure ſtars
And of the earth and heaven,
Thou that on heah-ſetle
Ever ſitteſt,
And the ſwift heavens turneſt!
Oh! who on earth
Obey thy commandments
As ſome do in heaven?
Man, man alone
Againſt thy will
Evermore worketh!

So rihtwiſe a king, diſtruſtful of himſelf, and continually ſeeking the good of others, was likely to have the bleſſing of Heaven on his deed. Much he laboured, not alone by ſchools and colleges to promote ſtæfencræft, but likewiſe to ſpread the knowledge of the holy Scriptures by multiplying copies. And, becauſe that the labour of tranſcription was great, and the labourers few, he was purpoſed that even religious women ſhould aſſiſt in the work; and had already opened his mind to me on the expedience of inſiſting much on the poyntel-cræft[1] of the holy virgins that might hereafter to my care be committed. To pleaſe him and edify myſelf, I now ſpent much time, both in tranſcription of Latin and Saxon, and in copying of illuminated initials

[1] Penmanſhip. See Wickliffe's Bible, "And he axed for a poyntel."

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and borders, with colours of red, blue, and yellow; but my materials were exceeding bad, nor had I as yet ſeen any good models, therefore my labour was not purpoſe-like or effective; albeit, it ſeemeth me as much pleaſure accrues to the performer of an indifferent as of a ſuperior work, if ſo be he is ſatisfied with himſelf. This labour I could purſue in my mother's chamber; and ſhe, being too feeble for much ſpeech, and having great reſpect for thoſe that were clerclic, did peaceably lie, with pillows underſette,[1] her eyes fixed on me and her hands folded, as if in the article of ſaying *Nunc dimittis*. Thus I tranſcribed much of the pſalter, and figured it as I went along with repreſentations of trees, rivers, men, birds, and beaſts, outlined with red ink, and filled up with the beſt colours I could find or make. Each night I read to my bleſſed mother and her women, the portion I had tranſcribed during the day, and commented thereon to the beſt of my poor power; whereby I could diſcern that I was, without yſeeking it, ſilently gaining of them the reputation of a young ſaint. This was very peacifying unto me, and went ſome way towards counterpoiſing the chief griev-

[1] Propped up.

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ance I now had in my mind, which proceeded from the cauſe following.

When my mother firſt fell ſick, there cometh twice or thrice from the king's royal court, ſumpter horſes, well guarded with ſpears, and laden, by the bounty of Ethelſwitha, with grain, wine, cakes, cracknels, ſpices, comfits, pepper, and, in fine, every dainty my mother could need, and every remedy, methinks, that could be in the book of Bald the Laece.[1] Inſomuch that my mother bade her ſtay her hand, for ſhe was by her goodneſs overſtocked, as well with things that would as would not decay, and provoke the greedineſs of mice, rats, and weevils. Therefore the ſumpter horſes came no more; and the lateſt envoy having the news that my mother was well to ſpeed with him ycarried, Ethelſwitha of a certainty made up her mind that ſhe was quite healthfulic, which was far off from the truth. From that ſeaſon we had no note nor ſignal of her remembrance of us, which troubled us full ſore. Of a truth, we were ſet at a great diſtance from the royal city; but kings and queens have ſo many men and horſes at their

[1] Bald the Leech wrote a medical treatiſe about the time of Alfred, containing two or three hundred preſcriptions.

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beck, that a handful of them might, certes, have been well beſtowed in doing us to wit that they ſometimes bear in mind we were in the land of the living. Howbeit, we were overlooked of long time; and when, at length, ſome token reached my mother, there was no queſtion for myſelf, no more than if I had for years in a cloiſter been yburied. This ſmote me at the heart; and when, of later time, I ſpake of it to Ethelſwitha, ſhe put it off lightly with, "Oh, we married women" . . . which made the matter not better but rather worſe, I'm bethinking![1] For, if married women have more buſineſſes and pleaſures than thoſe that, unwed, nigh the hearth twirl ſadly the long flax, they ought of their lonely ſiſters to be the more mindful. Soon I found, that whenas my thoughts went in this direction, my heavenly comforts faded: for that cauſe, after one or two ſore conflicts whereof none others wiſt, I gat much unto prayer, and unto reading and tranſcription, grinding colours, ſteeping and ſcraping of parchments; and, though much of my labour was in one ſenſe waſted, yet the demon was caſt out. Alſo, about this time, my father returned from his

[1] Ynbethincan, to bethink one's ſelf.

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attendance on king Buhred, who was purpoſed to go beyond ſeas, leaving behind him Ethelſwitha his queen, king Alfred's ſiſter. My father was, by advancing money unto him and to king Alfred, much impoveriſhed; and when my mother told him I was minded to profeſs, he cried, "What! my apple-bloſtm? I was purpoſed to give her unto the prince of Weſſex; howbeit, he with another wyf himſelf hath provided, ſo that, it may be, all is beſt as it is; for that, or ere my youngeſt ſhould wed much beneath my eldeſt, I would ſooner ſee her a blot."[1] Alſo he was pleaſed to ſay that he had found it ſo expenſive a pleaſure to be kinſman to two kings, that he thought a third would have ruined him. I marvelled my father ſhould take it thus eaſily, and was thankful he wiſt not I had repulſed the prince of Weſſex; howbeit, his indifference and the neglect of Ethelſwitha made me droop, which, my good mother noting, ſhe would have it that 'twas from overcare of her; ſo to ſet her at eaſe, I told her my heart's grief, and ſhe comforted me and told me ſhe had been grieved too. Alſo, ſhe told me how many excuſes ſhe had been able to make in her

[1] A sacrifice.

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own mind for Ethelſwitha; wherefore, after a few tears, I was able to go on my way peaceful-like, with ſtill increaſing love for my bleſſed mother.

Howbeit, the bearer of the tardy love-token having returned to the royal city, there arriveth, ſome three weeks afterwards, (it being then the ſummer of the year of our Lord 873) a company of ſpearmen guarding a ſumpter load of good things for my mother, and bearing an epiſtle ywritten in Ethelſwitha's name by Werefrith the chaplain. And the epiſtle ſignified that if my mother were now able to ſpare me, the queen was deſirous of my immediate company. And whereas I, being ſtill chafed, was minded to puniſh mine own ſelf by refuſing to go, my loved mother urged my ready compliance, and with my conflicting mind ſo ywrought, as that I ſtarted the next morning, royally attended. Now whereas my winter journey had been rough and dangerous, and performed with a troubled heart, the weather was now warm, and the air freſh, and the rivers fordable, and the huſbandmen at work in the fields, and the wild beaſts in their dens until nightfall. Therefore my ſpirit

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was glad and my heart rejoiced; the more by token that I thought my prayer and my vow had gone ſome way to win me the grace of the life of my bleſſed mother; and I had the fancy of ſomewhat good in ſtore for me, I wiſt not juſtly what. Therefore the road ſeemed ſhort and the journey delectable, albe it laſted three days. When we reached the royal city, it wanted about two hours of high noon; and Alfred the king, juſt returned from trying ſome new German hawks, was ſtanding at his gate, in his green hunting frock, ſurrounded by his ealdormen, gerefas, and thanes. His hair had partly eſcaped from its fillet; and as he ſtood talking and laughing with his train, he looked like what he was, a king and the ſon of a king. He lifted me from off my horſe, ſaying, "Ethelfled, you look as freſh as a roſe!" and led me in, all ſmiling, to the queen. With her was Bald the phyſician, who in ſtead of retiring as he might better have done, from the firſt greeting of us two dear ſiſters, only ſtood aſide, unmannerlike, and anon aſked me how fared the earl my father. I ſaid he had recovered from his foot-ail ſo wholly, as to have been on his duty to king Buhred. Thereupon he would

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know what had healed my father ſo ſpeedily. To him I replied that Gunfried had dieted him low, kept him cool, and given him mineral water from a ſpring of rare virtue. He repeated after me, "Low diet? kept him cool? mineral drinks? I am driven beſide myſelf, oh lady, to hear of ſuch ſenſeleſs proceedings. Do not we Saxons hate cold water? Is it ſuitable to our conſtitutions? This old woman might have been the death of your noble father by driving the ail from his extremities. Ye ſhould have loaded him with bedd-reafes, have fed him high, and have given him my tried preſcription: to wit, a penny-weight and a half of the dried heads of tuberoſe-iſis, which in the vulgar tongue we call greata-crauleac; half a penny-weight of pear-tree bark, Roman bark, and cummin; a fourth part of laurel berries, and ſix pepper-corns. All theſe you ſhould have ground to a powder, and added thereto two egg-ſhells full of good wine; and given him to drink thereof, until he got well."

Howbeit, my father had tried this remedy without ſucceſs, though I declared it not unto Bald; and, albeit Gunfried might, as the laece averred, have been his death, yet certain it is

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that under her care he became well. As ſay the common people, "No phyſics more rare, than ſimples with prayer," ſo it had proved in this inſtance. A gilded pill is ſometimes mortiferous. Flour of wheat, boiled in milk, hath healed the ſwelled knee of a ſaint.

About an hour before ſunſet of the ſame day, my women having uncorded my cheſt, I took therefrom the Pſalter I had illuminated at my loved mother's bedſide; and placed it, not without a little ſecret elation, in the hands of the king. Thereon he ſmiling and greatly content, called unto him Ethelſwitha, that they its contents ſimultaneouſly might behold. Now I with modeſty looked another way; but anon, venturing to caſt mine eyes to the king, I ſaw his eyebrows, which were very moveable, quickly upriſe and decline again, and his mouth betray that he was making merry at my expenſe. Then my face became ſuffuſed, as if with the red colour of ſtibium;[1] and I ſaid, "You have ſhamed me, my king." He ſaid, "Thy ſhame be upon me, my ſiſter! of a truth, to laugh at thee was unmannerlike, more eſpecially for thy failing well to depict things thou haſt never

[1] A rouge not unknown to the Anglo-Saxon ladies.

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seen; but indeed, Ethelfled, theſe waves of the Red Sea look like frætwungs,[1] and theſe clouds like dumplings. Neither wot I how theſe warriors ſhould eſcape being fined, for carrying their ſpears ſo dangerouſly, nor why this giant's head ſhould exceed in ſize his body, unleſs to be the better mark. But be not diſcouraged, my ſiſter; you need nothing but better teaching. Oh that I, in my boyhood, had in many things been better taught!" And, after a good deal more parley, that was delightſome and praiſeful, albeit that ſudden ſmile once and again lit up his face, he ſaith, "Have you ever heard of the famous goſpel of St. Cuthbert, commonly known as the Durham Book?"

I ſaid I knew it had been tranſcribed and illuminated by the Biſhop of Lindisfarne, a hundred years ago, and that he had been twenty-and-two years about it.

The king ſayth, "Siſter, believe me, no great work was ever perfected in a hurry. It was by labour and patience that the biſhop made his book worth a royal ranſom. I have deſired that mine eyes ſhould ſee it, long time, but would not ſend ſpears and horſes ſo far in

[1] The zigzag ornament ſo often ſeen in Saxon architecture.

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troubled times, only myſelf to pleaſe; nevertheleſs, now that it may profit you to ſee the book, I will ſend. It may be that the monks will lend it to me on pledge; or on the word of a king." Thereafter he praiſed my delineations of herbs and flowers, my colours of red and of blue, and the ſmoothneſs of my parchments: howbeit, when I to my chamber retired that night, I was diſturbed becauſe that my limnings had made merry the king; and was ready to wiſh that I had not ſhowed them unto him. Then ſaw I how far the pleaſure of executing a work of art exceedeth the pleaſure of having it appriſed by others when ywrought. For ſympathy is pleaſant, and praiſe is pleaſant; but the excellency of art is that it is allſufficient in itſelf. To conclude, I, Ethelfled, thus muſed in my mind: "Thou, O king, haſt many painful, many weariful hours; and is it not a good thing that, even at mine own expenſe, I for a little ſhould have made thee merry, my brother?"

Now, behold, over and above the ſtuff contained in my brazen-bound cheſt, as gems and goodly raiment, I had brought along with me two goat-skin bags or pokes, well lined, and ſecured at the mouth, containing ſundry matters;

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and herein, I bluſh to relate, I had, witleſs, placed an embroidered purſe, containing fifty-and-three mancuſa of gold, a love-token from my mother unto Ethelſwitha. And when the bags came to be emptied, behold, the purſe of gold was not therein; and the ſuſpicion of theft fell on Umfreig,[1] who had had the baggage in charge. Now, Umfreig was my father's cup-bearer. Full ſorry was I, therefore, that he of ſuch villany ſhould be accuſed; but what could I do? The loſs was Ethelſwitha's, not mine, wherefore, I was conſtrained to publiſh the matter. And becauſe that it could not be brought home to him, and he would not confeſs, it was decreed that he ſhould be tried by ordeal.

Now, on having his choice, whether of red-hot iron or of water boiling furiouſly, he decided on the latter, which ſome thought ſavoured of innocence, and others of audacious preſumption. For me, I was ready to weep for him, being aſſured of his guilt; albeit Wulfgith, my woman, ſaid ſomewhat ſcornfully, "Be at peace, lady, there are ways of ſeething without being hurt." Simon the prieſt took the direction of the whole.

[1] Humphrey?

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For three days he kept the man in retreat, feeding him on bread and ſalt, bitter herbs and water; and thus brought his ſpirit low. On the third day, a fire was kindled within the church, and water ſet thereon in a copper veſſel and made to boil, in the preſence only of the prieſt and the accuſed. Then entered two men of either ſide, and agreed that the water boiled furiouſly; then an equal number of additional men of either ſide entered the church, all faſting, and ranged themſelves on either ſide the ordeal. Then the prieſt ſprinkled them with holy water and made each of them taſte thereof; then they kiſſed the Goſpels, and were ſigned with the ſign of the croſs. All this while the fire was not mended, and peradventure the water ceaſed boiling; elſe how ſhould enſue what happened? A ſtone being caſt into the pot, Umfrieg plunged his hand in after it and drew it out, while Simon the prieſt uttered an ejaculatory prayer, that the truth might be made manifeſt unto all men. The hand was wound up in a linen cloth and ſealed; in that faſhion it was kept for three days. At the end of that time, the ſeals were broken, the cloth was unwound; and the hand was found . . . whole! like as its fellow.

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Now, here enſues the marvel. Umfrieg was afterwards detected endeavouring to paſs one of the mancuſa, which, unbeknown to him, was marked; and being taken in the manner, he confeſſed, and ſhould have ſuffered death. Howbeit, his kinſmen redeemed him by paying his were, and the amount of the ſtolen treaſure, beſides giving borh for his future fidelity. Now, albeit he confeſſed his own guilt, he could not be brought to confeſs any colluſion or deceit in the adminiſtration of the ordeal; albe Bald the phyſician, who was certified in his own mind that ſome outward application had hardened his hand, offered him monies and his mediation with my father, if he the ſame would reveal; alleging that the individual wrong would be greatly atoned for by the general benefit that would enſue therefrom. Not one word would he confeſs, that hardened Umfrieg! So Bald interceded not with my father: the office of cup-bearer was given unto Snel; and Umfrieg, after lying long in bonds, was caſt forth, a feolun, that is to ſay, one who hath not a penny. In the old days, had he eſcaped with his life, he would have loſt hand and foot. I think he

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afterwards joined a hloth.[1] All this crime and ſorrow might I, Ethelfled, have prevented, had I locked the money in the oaken cheſt.

Now, ſave for this untoward event, my viſit to the court as at this time was full pleasant; but, in ſo far as others were concerned in it, completely ſecular. There was much to tell, much to hear: when I ſpake of taking the veil, no one ſeemed to hear me. Many people came and went: among the reſt was the king of Northumbria's ſon, who came and did not go. He was winſome, clerclike, and could play well on the harp and rote. To my great ſurpriſe Ethelſwitha aſked me if I would have him to my huſband. I ſaid no; I was the bride of heaven, and dared not to think of an earthly ſpouſe—it would be ſin. She ſaid that was nothing; I had taken no vows, and was as yet unfettered; but I knew I had taken a vow in my heart, as ſacredly as if before the biſceopa at the altar. Howbeit I told her not, ſave in general, that I could not, nor would not, wherefore Ethelſwitha was on no wiſe to be blamed for that ſhe bade the king to talk to me.

[1] A band of thieves.

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But it fell that ere he returned from the chaſe, I had the grace of a few hours to myſelf; and the end of my reflections was, that my Saviour muſt be all or nothing to me; that my word would not be worth an egg if I kept it not to him, albeit none elſe had wiſt it to be pledged; that there was much peace and much profit to be hoped for, if my life were hidden with Chriſt in God, that he could help me, and that he would help me through all trials, if ſo be I gave myſelf wholly to him; and that I could and that I would.

Therefore the king, when he had ſpeech of me, found me firm as a rock, and after ſaying all that could be ſaid on the matter as well as any one could ſay it, he came to a pauſe. Then quoth the king, "I never knew ſo ſteadfaſt a mind! go on thy way rejoicing, Ethelfleda! heavenly angels be thy ſpeed! Noted ſhalt thou be among our holy women; and for all thou ſayeſt, in thy too great modeſty, of the uſeleſſneſs of an unmarried woman's life, be ſecure it needs not in thy caſe to be ſo, but may be quite otherwiſe; for you may help me in my ſchemes greatly. I have ſtore of high and holy work that none but one ſo pure, ſo gentle, ſo

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wiſelike as thyſelf can do; and I wit thou wilt do it well for me, my ſiſter."

Thereon, what could I do but kiſs his hand, and then haſte away to the chapel and kneel down before the altar? Happy, happy! to wit that in giving myſelf wholly unto God, I might yet be uſeful to and find favour with the king.

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BOOK V.

ALFRED the king ſent a company of ſpearmen into the north,[1] to demand of the monks of Lindisfarne (who had found refuge in the monaſtery of Crayke) the loan of the Durham Book. And in pledge thereof, he ſent his holy ring and golden circlet with gems yſette, for the ſaid monks to have and hold until that he the book ſhould reſtore. Were the time and place convenient, I would now relate the dangers theſe ſpears met with by the way, and the number of days their journey laſted; howbeit, they wonne back at length unto the royal vill, and with them brought the book, which the monks humbly prayed that the king of his mercy would neither dog's-ear nor deface. Now the king, being advertiſed that the book was at

[1] We muſt take this on Ethelſled's authority, if at all.

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hand, did inſtantly remit and ſet aſide the matters he was then engaged in. And ſending for the queen, and for me Ethelfled, that we his pleaſure might partake, he ſpent the entirety of that afternoon, and much of ſundry afternoons following, in contemplating with us the delineations and devices which had taken the good biſhop of Lindisfarne twenty-and-two years to execute.

Now, when I ſaw what good limning might in very deed amount to, I appriſed my own craftleſs attempts as meanly as the king himſelf could do—(howbeit he had never made merry with them again;) and with much zeal and application I ſet myſelf to copy as many of the borderings and initial letters in the Durham Book as time would allow, in colours of azure, and green, and violet, and yellow, and ſcarlet, and gold. For Werefrith the chaplain had learned the art of preparing gold for the illumination of manuſcripts; and the way he did it was this. He filed the gold very finely, brayed it in a mortar with the ſharpeſt vinegar[1] he could get, (which proved to be some home-made wine my loved mother had made of her

[1] Ecet: i.e. acetum.

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own grapes, and ſent to the king; but we never did her to wit what it came to,) and whenas it turned black, he poured it forth. Then he added unto it ſome ſalt or nitre, which diſſolved it and made it fit for uſe.

Alſo, for he was clever in little things, he wiſt how to prepare parchment much better than I had done; and alſo vellum. His method with the firſt was this: he let it lie, by the ſpace of three days, under lime; then ſtretched it, ſcraped it well on either ſide, then dried it, and ſtained it of what colour it liked him beſt. It pleaſeth me to wit how all things ſhould be done, albeit ſome things it pleaſeth me not to do.

About this time, my father brought to Wincheſter our royal lady Ethelſwitha, queen of Mercia; and then returned after a while to his duty on king Buhred, who was purpoſed he ſhould accompany him to Rome; his royal ſpouſe was meantime to remain in the ſafeguard of her brother, king Alfred. Thus we had two queens, Ethelſwithas, at court; which ſome people peradventure thought one too many. Howbeit Alfred the king was always very kind unto his own cyth and cynn; and thus it fell that Ethelſwitha his ſiſter lived upon him

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many a day; and when the troubles of the country increaſed, became no ſmall burthen unto him. For this queen was one of thoſe who, while for ever giving out that they are nobody, are yet always expecting to be treated like ſomebody. Howbeit, the king at length perſuaded her to go into a monaſtery; and I am thankful to ſay it was not mine.

Ethelſwitha, that is to ſay my ſiſter, had no need to fear the compariſons that could not fail to be made between her and the queen of Mercia; there being as much difference between them as between feſcue and cord-graſs.[1] For whereas my ſiſter had always been of excellent beauty, there was now no woman equal unto her for fairneſs, in or about the court. And whereas the queen of Mercia's hair was of reddiſh yellow, and rather harſh, Ethelſwitha's was of the paleſt brown, ſilky, and a marvel for length. And ſometimes, for the greater ſtate, ſhe let it down to its full length, confined only by a circlet of pearls: but more commonly ſhe put it up in ſhining coils, like Judith of Bethulia in the ſong; whence the king would

[1] Cord-graſs is remarkably ſtiff and ſtrait; feſcue affords excellent paſturage.

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call her "the woman of the twiſted locks." And whereas the queen of Mercia's eyes were of a cold grey colour, and ſomewhat too prominent, Ethelſwitha's were blue, with ſoft ſhadowings round about. And whereas the queen of Mercia did nothing from morn to night but exact ſervice and talk like the fooliſh, Ethelſwitha was ever caring for others. And whereas the queen of Mercia always loved to be helped to the beſt, Ethelſwitha always helped her to the beſt. And whereas the queen of Mercia was full troubleſome unto her brother,[1] and Ethelſwitha loved him as her own ſoul, it came to paſs that the king wearied a little of his ſiſter, and loved his wife exceedingly.

Now, by reaſon of this queen's coming to Wincheſter and taking ſo much upon her, it naturally befel that I loſt my place a little; not only as ſecond woman at court, but in the thoughts of the king and of the queen: and thus my approaching profeſſion ceaſed to be the chief thing talked of. Alfred the king was minded to build and endow a noble monaſtery for ranclike virgins at Shaftesbury, and to make

[1] In this eſtimate of the queen of Mercia, we fancy we ſee a little feminine diſparagement.

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me the mitred abbeſs thereof; but the houſe, which was to be of ſolid ſtone, would take long to raiſe; and moreover he was rather ſhort of money; wherefore he and my father thought it good that I ſhould become poſtulant at Wareham Abbey in Dorſetſhire, which is dedicated to St. Etheldreda, or, as we ſay in the vulgar tongue, St. Audrey. The mothers and ſiſters amounted but to twenty; and were had in reputation, as well for the ſimplicity of their rule and their ſanctity, as for their deft handling of the needle, and their ſkill in making ſweetmeats. Wherefore, I was taken thither by my good father, to do the abbeſs to wit of my intentions. We were three days on the road, and ſlept one night at Winborne. The holy mother received us right kindlike; ſhe was pleaſed at the honour and wealth about to be conferred on her houſe; add to which, as I have ſince learned, the arrival of a new face in a religious houſe is as that of an angel. We ſaw nought of the nuns, ſave in the chapel. The abbey, which ſtood aloof from the town and caſtle, on a little peninſula formed by the confluence of two rivers, was getymbrade[1] on piles of oak and alder, by reaſon that the marſhy

[1] Built of timber; like Croyland monaſtery.

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ground would not bear the weight of ſtone, and was ſurrounded by many willows and ruſhes. The chapel had, till of late, been thatched inſtead of leaded; and, for lack of glazing to the windows, the ſwallows and ſparrows had been uſed to fly in and out, chirping and ſcreaming, and to build their neſts within the roof.

I returned with my father to Wincheſter, to await ſome needful forms. I ſaw a couple of treow-whirtas by the road-ſide, a-making of a gate, the poſts whereof lay on the ground; and I noted that as much of the wood was prepared to lie under the ground as above it, for the greater ſtrength. Then remembered I Eadwulf's homely ſaying; and was a little troubled that I had indeed ſeen but the outſide of a nunnery. At the king's palace gate were gathered many men and horſes; and one of our own freedmen, ſtepping up unto my father, ſaid, "The lady Eadburga hath arrived." Then my heart rejoiced, for that my bleſſed mother, who had made the journey by ſhort ſtages, had reached the royal vill. And when I ſaw her loved face, with the deep-lined marks of her late pains on it, that were no pains now, I felt gladlike that Heaven had reſtored her dear life and liſtened

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unto my vow, and I was ready to yield myſelf up, a willing ranſom. Alfred the king looked grave but yet kind, when he ſaw me: and, ſaith he, "Thou haſt taken the firſt ſtep now, and wilt not, I think, fall back." I ſaw he would not think highly of me if I did.

Then, or ever my father returned unto king Buhred, which he very ſhortly did, we had a little ſnatch of family happineſs, before we parted for ever: for I ſaw his face no more. Very bitter-ſweet was our communing together; but my mother was a very conſcientious woman,[1] and would on no account put a ſtumbling-block in my path by her lamentations. I wonder, even now, that they oppoſed not my vocation a little earlier, nor bemoaned it a little more than, it ſeems to me, they did. After all, I was very young and tender. . . .

Howbeit, Alfred the king had other burthens on his mind. It fell one day, that I was illuminating a capital G with gold, and with ſcarlet, and with purple, when he came and ſtood beſide me, overlooking me. I thought that peradventure he was again making merry at my

[1] She was living in the time of Aſſer, who ſpeaks of her in terms of high praiſe.

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expenſe, and was about to aſk him what fault he was now finding, when I heard him give a deep ſigh; and, looking up, ſaw he was not thinking of my work in any wiſe, but of ſomething afar off. And ſeeing me look up, he ſaith, "Woe is me, my ſiſter! . . I wis not if to any good I have as yet been born. The land is full of foemen:—what have I done? nothing. The land alſo is full of miſery,—what have I done? nothing. The land alſo is full of ignorance, and ſo is its king, and what have I done? nothing. Woe is me!"—I ſaid, "All men love you, my king." He ſaid, "But I deſpiſe myſelf. For I know ſomething ſhould be done, and I know not how to do it, nor what it is. . . Ho! the happy man that ever had a ſword hanging over his head by a ſingle hair! And yet ſo it always is with me!"[1] And he groaned in himſelf and turned away.

Another time, we were riding at a breathing pace, through the green ſhaw, when we heard a countryman behind the buſhes ſay to his fellow, "Thou didſt not vail thy cap unto the king." And the other made anſwer, "Na, I wunna. For, as comely as he is, wi's blue eyen an' white

[1] See Alfred's Boethius.

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teeth, he's as cruel as a viking, an' ſtrings up poor knaves an' they do but ſay bentgraſs is fox-tail. I'ſe none of ſuch vikingr." Then the king ſaid to me under his breath, bitterly, "So, all men love me! . . I am a viking! ſorrow is mine, my ſiſter! I did but ſeek to keep them from notorious lying and violence and taking of bribes by a few examples: and they ſay I hang men for miſtaking one graſs for another!" Then conſidered I, and ſaw that of all men kings are born to trouble, as the ſparks fly upward; and I pitied him in my heart. Alſo I ſaw that nothing mundane, including worldly pomp, royal eſtate, beauty of perſon, connubial felicity, can give entire peace; which cannot be found out of ourſelves, nor yet in ourſelves, but only in God. Howbeit, I did not yet apprehend this perfectly.

As about this time, Alfred the king returned the Durham Book to the monks of Lindisfarne; offering them twenty hides of land, with men and horſes thereto belonging, if they would part with it. But they would not; foraſmuch as they alleged its value to be above rubies: therefore they returned him his circlet and holy ring.[1]

[1] This reſts on no better authority than that of Ethelfled, which, we

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Alſo about this ſeaſon began the doctrine of tranſubſtantiation, newly brought over from France, to be much ſpoken about and ſpoken againſt among us. To me Ethelfled it ſeemeth the people of that land muſt needs, like the Athenians of old, be ever running after ſome new thing: inaſmuch as, not many years back, they took up the religious worſhip of graven images, and thought to bring us unto it; albeit, we would not hearken unto them. Alſo, there are thoſe among them that fable a place cleped purgatory, where the ſouls of them that were neither bad nor good (as though Chriſt ſpake of any but the ſheep and goats!) are to be kept until that the prayers of the living ſet them free. I can only ſay that it will be a bad day for England when theſe corruptions are allowed to creep in and eſtabliſh themſelves among us: peradventure they will, for that we are too wanting in ſuſpicion and too fond of imitating our neighbours; howbeit, I hope it will not be in the time of me Ethelfled; they ſhall not be countenanced in this houſe if I can help it.

need not repeat, is none at all. The Durham Book is one of the moſt intereſting relics in the MSS. department of the Britiſh Muſeum.

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Now, the time of my admiſſion as poſtulant drawing nigh, my women were buſied in making me the given number of white tunics; and I divided among them as impartially as I could, my pale and dark tunics, and all the reſt of the gay coloured raiment I no longer ſhould want. For ſimplicity and uniformity of attire is the firſt rule of the religious life. Natheleſs, my white tunics coſt double the price of the coloured, and were more trouble to make. For there were certain folds in the wide ſleeves I was minded to have fitted with much nicety, for the greater grace; which coſt my maidens much trouble and ſome tears: whereupon Urfried, my mother's woman, was heard to ſay there was leſs trouble in fitting a bride than a nun. Urfried would fain have all the credit to herſelf; and when the younger woman tried the fitting and miſſed it, ſhe was heard to ſay, "Young people are wonder' wiſe now-a-days; and yet I have been thought to know a cricket from a graſs-hopper."

Now Ethelſwitha's mind was that I ſhould enjoy as much world's-pleaſure as poſſible in the little time me remained: whereas, I deſired, and my mother upbore me in it, that I ſhould

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thenceforth partake of nothing that ſhould interfere with my vocation.

Nevertheleſs, there was a pleaſure, the only one in ſtore, and a full brief one, the which my heart faſtened on as greedily as it could have done on any pleaſure of the world. This was my looked-for journey to St. Audrey's in company of the king and the queen, who were minded to ſee me to the laſt, and who, I thought, would afford me even pleaſanter and dearer companionſhip than even my father had done; and I wis that the imaginings of this journey, its halts and ſhort ſtages, and my naturally being foremoſt in my companions' thoughts, blinded me no little to the obſcure darkneſs beyond. But mark how mundane things turn out! My mother was too feeble for the journey: Alfred the king was detained at court by preſſing buſineſs; and he behoved to allot the conduct of the progreſs to the laſt perſon I could have wiſhed to go with me. I ventured to name this ſlightly unto the king. He ſaid, "Why?" . . . Alas! how hard a matter it ſometimes is, when "Why" is aſked, to give a ſtraightforward answer! . . . I did not, and the matter ſtood as it was.

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Now Ethelfwitha was purpoſed in her heart to go with me, at leaſt one day's journey: nothing could ſhake her. So a company of ſpears was appointed; and the Mercian queen, thinking it promiſed fair to be a pleaſing party, and being no ways minded to keep houſe with my mother, ſpake of going and returning with Ethelfwitha. Truly this would have ſpoiled all; and if ſhe had had the leaſt rihtlike feeling, ſhe would not have thought to thruſt herſelf between the parting embraces of two dear ſiſters. Happily, ſhe gave it up; partly becauſe Alfred the king went not, partly, methinketh, becauſe that her hair always roughened with much riding in the wind, let her ſmear it ever ſo much with honey. And thus, my loved ſiſter and I had not the trouble of her company.

I will not ſay much of my parting with my mother: it could not fail that we ſhould weep ſore; howbeit, I dried mine eyes as ſoon as I could. Whoever you are, now a-reading this book, you cannot need to be told that great ſtir was occaſioned at St. Audrey's by the arrival of the queen, who thought fit to go with me the whole way. All that day there was buſtle and feſtivity; the day following commenced my

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three days' retreat, which I bore better than I had looked for; that is, more brave-like, but I think, not much to my ſpiritual good, for my thoughts were all in tumult. Then I confeſſed, and we all went to maſs (the queen had received the king's concurrence by a ſpecial meſſenger); then I, in white yclad, ſtood outſide the chapel door, and knocked. The prieſt and holy mother aſked what I wanted. I made anſwer that I deſired to be admitted as poſtulant into the community. They let me in, and led me up unto the altar. Then the prieſt cut off a ſmall lock of my hair, and bleſſed me, and gave me a roſary. I aroſe, and went away, quite ſelf-collected. At noon, Ethelſwitha departed.

In going up unto the altar, I had heard ſome one whiſper unto my ſiſter, "What a beautiful poſtulant!" which I tried not to attend to, nor remember. But how weak and wrong a thing to let me hear ſuch an ejaculation at ſuch a moment! For, doth not a ſingle dead fly taint the box of precious ointment? And my ſelf-devotion was at that moment as ointment poured forth at my Saviour's feet. Thus we add to one another's ſins and to one another's burthens.

When Ethelſwitha had departed, the holy

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mother ſummoned me into her chamber, and told me in detail the rule of the houſe.[1] While ſhe was yet ſpeaking, ſome one tapped at the door; and ſhe ſaid, "Come in," and proceeded with her diſcourſe. A nun entered, who ſtraightway kneeled down within the chamber, and continued in that poſture until the holy mother had brought her ſpeech to a cloſe, which ſhe did not haſten, but rather drew out. Now, I Ethelfled had continually ſeen perſons kneel unto the king and to the queen, and unto mine own father and mother, but had never known them thus left long together without being bidden to ariſe; and the newneſs of the ſight was accompanied by commiſeration for the nun, who appeared feeble in body, and frequently changed colour. Howbeit, the holy mother at length ſaid compoſedly, "Thou mayſt ariſe, daughter;" whereupon, the nun gat from off her knees, approached the holy mother, kneeled again, kiſſed the hem of her garment, and then delivered ſome trifling meſſage. This little occurrence went much to the heart of me Ethelfled: I wiſt ſomewhat of the authority and dignity of the *matres monasterii*

[1] It is a diſputed point whether the Anglo-Saxon monaſteries were not under a ſimpler and more primitive rule than the Benedictine.

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without doors, as, how that a mitred abbeſs was exempt from the juriſdiction of the dioceſan, having in herſelf epiſcopal authority within her precincts, and alſo taking her ſeat in the great council of the nation; but I had neither beheld nor conceived the extent of her rule over her houſe, nor the amount of ſubjection of body, will, and thought, exacted of every ſoul within it. For albeit I had been bred up by an aunt who was an abbeſs, or, as we ſay in Saxon, *abudiſſe*, yet the children in a monaſtic ſchool ſee nought of the nuns' interior lives, wherefore my introduction to it was new and ſomewhat revolting to me.

The holy mother had ſcarce concluded her ſpeaking, when the bell rang us to the chapel, where I was ware of twenty pair of round eyes furtively gazing at me. After prayers came ſupper; and I found that my admiſſion was to be kept as a kind of feſtival: though there was but a humble feaſt, after all. The ſiſters had treen[1] platters; and only the holy mother and I had ſilver ſpoons. Indeed, mortification was their rule; but they ſeemed willing to depart therefrom, too, all they could. As ſaith Tinne, "He helped him to the

[1] Wooden trenchers.

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beſt, though it were but a marrow-bone." My ſeat was next the holy mother, which I took for a pleaſing recognition of my rank; howbeit, I ſhortly learned it was only becauſe I happened to be the only poſtulant. Recreation being permitted, there enſued ſome attempt at general diſcourſe; but it proved ſo dull that I was glad when the bell tolled for complines. Then we all formed in ſolemn proceſſion; and, with ſlow ſtep and heads abaſed, proceeded to night-prayer. A novice read the prayers and we made reſponſe; while candles were lighted before different ſhrines. Then we remained awhile in ſilent meditation, very huſhed and ſtill: then one of the ſiſters read a diſcourſe: then the holy mother bleſſed us: the portreſs brought in the houſe-keys and laid them on the altar, ſaying, "O holy Father! preſerve us this night from all evil!" Then we each kiſſed the floor; and proceeded orderly, ſilently, and in the dark, each to our own cell. There, having knelt in prayer, each again kiſſed the ground, ſaying, "Duſt I am, and to duſt ſhall I return:" then croſſed herſelf and lay down, ſaying, "Father, Son, and Holy Ghoſt, to you I commend my ſpirit."

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I Ethelfled could neither ſleep nor weep, nor even think. A tight cord ſeemed tied acroſs my heart: ſpiritually ſpeaking, *there was one.* Wherefore I lay awake and ſtill: and, at dead of night, I heard ſtealthful footſteps along the gallery. Two nuns and two novices were on their way to the chapel, to ſpend the conſecrated hour.

At four in the morning we aroſe. We went in proceſſion to the chapel. We ſpent an half-hour on our knees, in ſilent meditation. The bell rang for matins.

After this, we brake our faſt. Milk, bread, and a white, ill-made cheeſe, were placed on a table without a cloth. Each had a treen cup and platter. Each maintained ſilence. One read aloud. After breakfaſt, I was about to go and waſh my hands, but was rebuked, and told I muſt firſt aſk leave of a profeſſed nun. Thereat I Ethelfled was moved in ſpirit: howbeit I gave no token thereof. Many a ſtone lies under the ſmooth water.

Then we went to our appointed duties; ſome to their needles, ſome to their books, ſome to their pſalmody, ſome to miniſtering unto the poor. My buſineſs lay in the ſcriptorium. It

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was the pleaſure of Alfred the king that I ſhould obtain a competent knowledge of Latin; it being, indeed, very much againſt his rihtwiſe will that the church prayers ſhould not be in the vulgar tongue; ſince he would have had all men pray not only with the lips, but with the underſtanding alſo. Therefore it was that I Ethelfled, with his and the holy mother's concurrence, applied myſelf diligently unto the ſtudy thereof. And albeit I lamentably miſſed the aid of the king's chaplains, whoſe place my new teachers very poorly ſupplied, yet, by uncommon application on mine own part, I progreſſed faſt if not well: inaſmuch as, though I never attained unto writing Latin with purity, yet my readineſs in it exceeds that of any woman I know, to ſay nothing of many a prieſt, of that ſort whom the king is wont to call abbey-lubbers.

Now in this reſpect I ſoon found, and have continued to find all my life, that the labour brings its own reward. As ſaith the wiſe king, "If thou incline thine ear unto wiſdom, and apply thine heart to underſtanding; yea, if thou crieſt after knowledge, and lifteſt up thy voice for underſtanding; if thou ſeekeſt her as

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ſilver, and ſearcheſt for her as for hid treaſures; then ſhalt thou underſtand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God." And this heartineſs of application brought it to paſs that the hours I ſpent in the ſcriptorium ſoon became the happieſt of my day: and I even learned to love the death-like ſtillneſs, only broken by the twittering of the ſparrows outſide the window,[1] and the ſecurity from any more importunate interruption. Howbeit, juſt in the middle, it might be, of a difficult ſentence, the prayer-bell would ring; and after prayers came dinner; and after dinner, the hour of recreation, when it was ſingular to note after what various and child-like faſhions the ſiſters would relax themſelves . . . all under the holy mother's eye; and in her hearing, too!—and if ſhe heard a word ſhe thought amiſs, (and they were many,) the recreation was ſuſpended; which, ſave for the puniſhment of the reſt, I ſhould never have been ſorry for, for it was no recreation to me. At the hour's end, the bell tolled twice; then each nun croſſed herſelf, kneeled down, repeated Pater Noſter and Ave Maria, and returned to her allotted duty; and then my real recreation began. For,

[1] Ethyrl; literally, eye-hole.

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if I returned not unto the ſcriptorium, I applied myſelf, ſtill at the will of the king and of the holy mother, to the ſtudy of church muſic; which, as underſtood and practiſed in this abbey, was, I muſt ſay for it, exceeding bad. In king Alfred's royal chapel I had been uſed, aforetime, to have my ſoul lifted as unto heaven, while liſtening, as Aldhelm ſaith, "to the great organ with a thouſand blaſts, the ear being ſoothed by the windy bellows, while the reſt ſhone in the gilt cheſts." Alſo the ſweet ſingers had tranſported me much with their holy hymning after the faſhion of John the prieſt, who firſt brought the Roman method of ſinging into our iſland; and I learned many of their ſacred chants by ear, and could finger them on the organ; and ofttimes I regretted that there was no better method of marking the time apportioned to the ſquare characters that ſignified the notes than that derived from the quantity of ſyllables inſcribed over them. For ſome ſyllables ſhould be uttered ſhortly, and ſome long drawn out, even as long as the breath will laſt without making the finger red in the viſage or conſtraining to an abrupt concluſion: and, to facilitate this, I e'en invented a way for mine own uſe,

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which Alfred the king laughed at, and yet ſaid had good in it: to wit, ſetting the words beneath inſtead of above the notes, and placing above each note a numeral to ſignify how long the ſinger ſhould hold his breath, whether while one might deliberately count one, two, three, or four. And this invention I was fully perſuaded in mine own mind would greatly improve the practice of pſalmody; and whenſoever I ſhould be abbatiſſa, I reſolved to impart it to my nuns; but meanwhile it was neceſſary that I ſhould ſtudy it a little more myſelf; wherefore I took every occaſion afforded me by the holy mother, which was chiefly of an afternoon, to purſue the ſtudy of muſic all I could. And it commonly fell, that juſt as I was beginning to loſe remembrance of things terrene and reſtraints conventual, and was upſoaring to heaven's gate like a lark, the laſt bell would ring. Then the reſt of the round went on: in deſcribing one day I deſcribe a hundred.

Now the ſecond night of my poſtulant's life, though I could not ſleep, I could weep. Methought I ſaw Ethelſwitha with her little child in her arms upſtretching its tiny hands and pulling her hair over her face; and my pale mother,

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grave-like, ſitting by and looking on as if ſhe noted them not, but were thinking of me. Then I wept and wept, and thought of Ethelſwitha's laſt whiſper, "Remember thou haſt taken no vows as yet, thou haſt only deſired to enter the community;" and I was ſore beſted. Then, while as I lay weeping, I minded me of Eadwulf's bringing the news of my mother's illneſs, and of my going into the king's chapel before matins and vowing a vow to dedicate myſelf a *willing* ſervant unto the Lord, if ſo be my mother's life might be ſpared. And as ſoon as I bethought me of this, my ſoul was no more toſt, but I yielded to a quiet peace, and croſſed my hands on my breaſt, and preſently fell on ſleep.

Next day I was ſummoned into the preſence of the holy mother. She bade me give up any little trinkets and keepſakes I might have about me that might ſtill keep up ſome remembrance of the world without. Reluctantly, I gave up one or two little love-tokens I had hoped, from their ſimplicity, I might retain; but there was one, I affirm and declare by whatever is ſolemn, that I remembered not at the time, nor, indeed, had on my perſon: to wit, that lock of king

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Alfred's hair which was cut off the firſt time of all that ever he came unto our houſe; and which I had ſince cnytted with one of Ethelſwitha's, and now was uſing as a book-mark. I declare I remembered it not: *afterwards*, I thought it was too late, the time was gone by, it would ſeem ſo ſilly and ſhameful to produce it; the holy mother would think I had kept it back of purpoſe, which I had not,—I had clean forgotten. Beſides, that word 'whatever thou haſt about thee' . . . and I had it not about me. So there could be no ſin. Howbeit, methought I would confeſs it to the prieſt next time, and do as he bade me. Yet, as it fell, I in very deed forgat it that time; only to remember it again afterwards; ſo that it became a burthen unto me. Then I hid away the book-mark; but I wiſt where it was; had I had acceſs to fire or candle, I would have conſumed it. And ſo I fretted and was ſorry for my ſin; and at laſt told of it with tears, and ſaid truly, I had forgotten it at firſt, and ſhould I keep it now or give it up? To my great ſurpriſe and relief, the prieſt (he was very old and indulgent, though not very clever,) ſeemed to take little heed about it, and ſaid I might keep it. Oh the

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joy of that permiſſion! It was not that I cared ſo much, in very deed, about the book-mark, (albe it was the laſt token of thoſe I loved,) as that it had been the occaſion of ſin unto me; and I thought that the holy mother had been the firſt cauſe of that ſin, by exacting ſomething of me that God would not have required.

Bearing this occurrence in mind, I have ever been very lenient with the young perſons committed to my keeping; quick to detect deceit even about trifles, but gentle with them, and not exacting. For why ſhould we increaſe each other's burthens? Are they not already heavy enough?

There were a few curiouſly illuminated miſſals and manuſcripts in our library, to which I was allowed acceſs; and a ſiſter named Paula was proficient in this art, and gave me much inſtruction; ſo that I became ſkilful in the execution of delicate borderings and ornamental letters. When I had proſecuted this art ſome months, I happened to obtain a view of the Pſalter I had illuminated for king Alfred, which he had lent unto the holy mother; and, alone as I was in the ſcriptorium, my cheeks were warmly ſuffuſed, when I beheld what miſerable performances I in

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my folly and ignorance had ſet before the king. "What could he and muſt he have thought of them? and how was it he laughed no more?" were queſtions that troubled me greatly. At laſt, methought I was grieving more heartily for having been guilty of a laughable folly, than I might peradventure do for a ſerious ſin. Whereat I took heart, and reſolved to be a good artiſt even yet. He that ſtumbleth and falleth not, bettereth his pace.

Albeit the firſt week of my new courſe ſeemed as though it never would end, my neck grew uſed to the collar at laſt; and the zeal with which I applied myſelf unto my ſtudies took off for the ſeaſon all ſenſe of wearifulneſs and mood-seocneſſe. Howbeit, my ſedentary life and over-much labour of the brain preſently diſordered my health. Thereat the holy mother took grief; for, if I died before my profeſſion, what would become of the goodly hereditaments that were to be abalienated to the monaſtery? Moreover, ſhe was well affected towards me: none the leſs ſo for my being the queen's ſiſter, though ſhe loſt no occaſion of ſhowing that worldly diſtinctions were made no account of within abbey precincts. Nevertheleſs, ſeeing me fall ſick,

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albeit I needed not to be ſent into the infirmary, ſhe ſomewhat abated the rigidity of the rule in my caſe, and cauſed me to exchange the too diligent employment of my pen for a certain meaſure of exerciſe in her garden. Even this was little enough for one that had been uſed aforetime to ſo much exerciſe in the open air; and whileas I paced the narrow walks amid the flower-beds, I muſed in my mind whether women ſerved God more rihtlike for being mewed up like birds in cages; and whether, when I came to be abbeſs, I might not, in this reſpect, any wiſe remit the rule.

Now, while I was at my pen, the ſiſters were moſtly at their needles; their embroidery was a very miracle for delicateneſs; and as it was much in requeſt in the world without, and brought no ſmall gain unto the abbey, they were habituated to work garments of empty pride in diverſified colours, which I Ethelfled ſecretly thought inconſiſtent with their profeſſion. For had they not by their own examples borne teſtimony againſt the wimples and the tunics of this world, the cyrtels, the mentels, and the fine linen? and had they not adopted, inſtead of a ſtomacher a ſackcloth, and inſtead of well-ſet hair baldneſs,

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and I was nigh to ſaying, inſtead of much waſhing and bathing, a great indifference to the application of freſh water? Sorry am I to ſay it, but ſo it was: never have I yet been able to underſtand why, to preſent the cleaner heart unto God, we ſhould go with unwaſhen hands; never could I ſee the peculiar ſanctitude of St. Cuthbert's practice of wearing his leathern boots day and night for months together till they dropped off his feet; nor was there anything I leſs admired in Queen Etheldreda, abbeſs of Ely, and our patron ſaint, than her wearing none but woollen under-garments, and rarely uſing a hot bath. Howbeit, theſe things muſt of courſe be approached with reverence; and there may be ſomething very improving in dirt, though I Ethelfled have never been able to find it, but on the contrary have always endeavoured to inculcate among the poor that reſorted unto me for an alms, that cleanlineſs was next to godlineſs.

To a certain extent, it was indiſpenſable to the ſiſters who broidered fine linen, or they would have marred their work. A new pattern was to them a thing of infinite moment. Diſcovering this, I recreated myſelf by inventing[1]

[1] In later times, we find Dunſtan deſigning patterns for a lady's dreſs.

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and tracing for them figures of ſaints, angels, men and women hunting and hawking, grey-hounds, eagles, peacocks, &c., the which they with their minute ſtitches ywrought in the perfecteſt manner. I think the Babyloniſh garment that made Achan to ſin could ſcarce have been rarer than ſome of the robes which they worked; but they were too ſtupid to be able to depart from what was ſet down for them in any wiſe, without involving themſelves in difficulty. Alas for the poor ſiſters! they were more like grown children than I had wiſt that women might be. The ſecond evening that I abode among them, I had a moving inſtance of the ſlaviſh degradations to which they were ſubject. During ſupper-time, a ſiſter was conſtrained to proſtrate herſelf on the floor, and trace thereon the form of the croſs with her tongue, for having betrayed ſome ſignals of impatience when one of the mothers chode her for having disfigured her work by pricking her finger. And while I was ſorry at heart, and could not forbear caſting wiſtful glances at the holy mother, who immovable ſate, the others only ſmiled among themſelves, and had no touch of compaſſion for her, the poor ſiſter.

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When I thus noted, day by day, how fooliſh and unſpiritual were theſe my allotted companions, to caſt my lot amongſt whom I had abſcinded myſelf from the angelical diſcourſings of holy Neot, the deep reaſonings of our Mercian Werewulf, and the heavenward aſpirations of Alfred the king, I was diſmayed within myſelf at the thought of becoming like theſe my aſſociates, who only ſerved to deaden my devotion. My walk with God became ſpiritleſs and languid: I confeſſed it with tears unto the prieſt: he preſcribed the uſual penances and remedies; and, after all, concluded with bidding me look forward to my new abbey. The firſt ſtone had, indeed, not yet been laid; but an aſſured hope, however diſtant, gives the ſoul a ſtay; and in my mind I ſaw it already getymbrade and gefrætwian,[1] leaded and glazed, with loud bells and deep-ſounding organ, and beheld myſelf the mitred abbeſs, taking precedence of the abbeſs of Wimborne in the great council, and ruling a community of holy and high-born ſiſters, all ſpiritual, all intellectual, all meek-

[1] Adorned with teeth-like ornaments or zigzags. The word getymbrade, though ſtrictly applicable only to wooden buildings, was in common uſe to expreſs ſtonemaſonry.

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ſpirited, and all profoundly attached unto myſelf. Then conſidered I and bethought me how we would relieve the poor, nurſe the ſick, inſtruct the ignorant, entertain noble travellers, illuminate manuſcripts, ſend alms to foreign parts, and be well reported of all Chriſtendom. Then muſed I in my mind that at the preſent time my practice in ſundry of theſe acts of mercy was but ſmall; I wiſt not the properties of herbs like Gunfried, nor to dreſs wounds like Urfried, nor to uſe the vein-knife like my bleſſed mother, nor to infuſe cooling drinks like Ethelſwitha. Wherefore I made prayer unto the holy mother that I might take my turn in the infirmary, which ſhe readily granted. Herein I found two or three trifling caſes, and one that was like to be protracted of long time, to the great trial of patient and nurſe . . . to wit, an afflicted ſiſter called Mildred, who I think was as great a ſufferer as the nun Tortgith of Barking, that was bound in the bonds of excruciating diſeaſe nine years, till at length her bones would hardly hold together. Is it not in Bede?

The ſkin of this poor nun was as colourleſs as parchment, and her frame ſo attenuated as that I could lift her with eaſe; and ſuch were her

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patience and ſweetneſs that I clave unto her in love, and found no greater pleaſure than in miniſtering unto her night and day. And whereas her former nurſes were wellnigh wearied out, and had grown ſomewhat fretful at being inceſſantly hindered of their ſleep, they were thankful to be quit of their charge. And ſhe, exchanging help that was begrudged for help that was proffered in love, conceived for me a deep and grateful affection, and ſeemed to take a new leaſe of life; albe it proved to be but a blaze of the expiring taper in the ſocket. Now, of this poor nun, I wiſt no more than that ſhe was a thegn's daughter; for it was our rule to hold no diſcourſe with each other concerning our forepaſt lives; wherefore ſhe in like manner knew no more of me than that I was ſiſter to the queen. However, ſhe made out, as was no hard matter, that I was ſorry of cheer, and took to the cloiſter unkindlike. Wherefore, at thoſe ſeaſons her pains intermitted and gave her a little reſt, ſhe ſpake angel-like of the cares and temptations of this ſorry world, and its ſhort duration; and the long duration of the glory-bright heaven, and how little it would matter when once we had attained unto it, and ſaw our

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Lord in the face, through what tribulations we had paſſed to reach it, except, indeed, that every tear ſhed would be another pearl in our crown. And ſhe told me that when ſhe found herſelf pining for a ſight of the green fields, ſhe thought how gay and enamelled would be the fields of glory; and when for the blue ſky, ſhe thought how blue would be the ſky of heaven; and when for dear faces and old friends, how ſhe ſhould there have them for ever and ever, beſides many new ones, as well or better worth knowing. Hearing her thus diſcourſe, I became inſenſible or indifferent to my late afflictions; and ſhe juſt lived to ſee me take the white veil, and then departed in peace, without need of the roſary expreſſly bleſſed by the Pope to procure her a happy death, for which the holy mother had ſent to Rome. I looked out of window as her happy ſpirit fled, to ſee was there a trail of glory, but there was nothing of the ſort, nor yet any audible ſound of celeſtial ſinging; and yet I believe ſhe went ſtraight to heaven, for all that.

Now, as touching the white veil, which, had it not been for Mildred, I might never have taken at all, in ſpite of the contumely, ſo diſap-

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pointed was I of what I had looked for in a convent life. . . . The holy mother ſent for me one day, while Mildred was ſtill in the body and hard wreſtling with her laſt enemy, and my mind was ſo pre-occupied with her, and mine eyes ſo accuſtomed to the darkened room, that the light of the gallery ſeemed ſtrange to me. . . . The holy mother did me to wit that the king and the queen had heard of my tender miniſtrations to the afflicted ſiſter, and were marvellouſly moved thereat: that they eſteemed and reverenced me beyond what they had ever done before I entered the cloiſter, and were purpoſed to ſhow their uncommon ſenſe of my deſervings by coming to ſee me take the white veil: that I was a light ſet upon an hill, that could not be hid; and othermuch to the ſame purport, which with earthly pride and human vanity elated the mind that, on entering the holy mother's chamber, had been ſet on far better things. The end was, that at that moment I felt no averſeneſs to engage for all that was expected of me; and the preparations which thereupon immediately enſued for the approaching feſtivity, filled the whole abbey with jocundity, and made me ſee ſmiling faces wherever I went. Every one now was ſo

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kindly affectioned towards me that it ſeemed as if hitherto a cloud had been between me and them, which had prevented me from diſcerning their merit: whereas, I believe, a tranſitory gleam of ſunſhine a-lighting of a dull landſcape, would have been the better image. Even the nun Mildred, reviving a little ere ſhe ſped away into the realms of light, took an innocent pleaſure in the richneſs of my dreſs, and the tiring of my hair, which ſhe would ſmooth down with her thin hand: and, to pleaſe her, I would ſmile in her face whenever our eyes met; ſo that I ſeemed, even to myſelf, to be more light of heart. But then came my nine days' retreat, in ſilence, ſolitude, and faſting, which brought my ſoul more acquainted with itſelf than ever it had been yet. I think, if it had been protracted ever ſo little more, I ſhould have gone mad, the preſſure was ſo heavy. As it was, I had dreams and viſions, ſleeping and waking, of good and bad angels and many unutterable things, ſo that ſometimes I could ſcarce forbear ſhrieking aloud. At length came a dull, apathetic fit of waiting, and counting the days and the hours that divided me from Ethelſwitha; and then a heavy, dreamleſs ſleep. Therefrom I was awakened by the

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holy mother in her blandeſt voice; ſhe told me the king and queen had arrived, and the biſhop was ready to confeſs me, and then I ſhould dreſs, and ſup in the parlour.

Oh, it was no ſimulated joy with which I greeted my ſiſter! Saith the king, "So, Ethelfleda, you hold on to the end!" and I knew from his look and tone that he truſted I ſhould do ſo in very deed, and would have been ſore amazed and troubled had I given any ſignal of wavering. From that moment I took my part, and played it. Oh, how gay was our ſupper! how ſleepleſs the night that followed it! Awake I had been dreaming, and, when I might as well have dreamed, I could not ſleep. The holy mother, on ſuperviſing my attire before I entered the royal preſence, had ſaid, "Thou wilt ſadden the queen's heart, dear daughter, if ſhe ſeeth how pale thy cheeks have waxen with nurſing thy poor ſiſter;" and would have touched them with a little ſtibium, a thing I looked not for in a nunnery; howbeit, though I dared not gainſay her with my lips, mine eyes did ſo in ſilence ſo plainly that ſhe, ſmiling, ſaid, "Thou art red enow, now . . . we will let nature hold her own" —and ſtayed her hand.

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That night, methinks the king told me more of the current affairs of the realm during the foregone year than the holy mother would have recommended my hearing; but who ſhall ſay unto a king, What doeſt thou? Wherefore I had matters to ſtay my mind upon for many a day: and perſuaded I am that the cognizance of moving tranſactions takes our thoughts from too intent ſelf-ſcrutiny, and too haraſſing afflictions about petty troubles. The ſiſters being all ſo jocund without any ſimulation, Ethelſwitha was aviſed to ſay, "How happy you all ſeem here! Were I not a queen, I would fain be a nun." And the king, eating our placentas,[1] which, indeed, were very delicate, ſaid, "If you holy ladies are always eating theſe good things, no marvel you are ſo fat and well-liking." . . . If, indeed! —I have often ſince thought of their ſayings.

There were certain law-deeds and parchments, abalienating certain of the portion of lands allotted to me, unto the abbey; but the moſt part was kept back till I ſhould take the black veil. After the king and the queen had retired unto the gueſt-chamber, I remained kneeling before the hoſt until the firſt nocturn. At day-

[1] Cheeſe-cakes.

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break I received the holy communion. Then I was dreſſed as a bride, and the queen herſelf adorned me with jewels and ſleeked my hair with the ſilver comb ſhe had uſed in my childhood. When ſhe ſaw mine eyelids quiver, ſhe kiſſed me, and ſaid, "Thou art quite worn out, dear child, by thy tending of that poor nun." Then my bridemaidens led me to the ſteps of the altar. Then we ſang "Domine, non ſum dignus." Then the biſhop bleſſed my novice's dreſs, and cut off a large treſs of my hair. Then I retired into the houſe, carrying my conſecrated habit, and I was clad in it, and my hair cut ſhort round. Then I returned, carrying my late garments, which, after anſwering the appointed queſtions, I trampled on before the altar. Then the biſhop bleſſed me, and gave me a crucifix and a roſary.

The reſt of the day was given to recreation. Mine was taking Ethelſwitha to the bedſide of the poor Mildred, who looked on her with great reverence and affection, and ſpake certain words which the queen ſaid in after-time ſhe never forgot. When the king, the queen, the biſhop, and all the gay train had departed, I in my new habit returned to the infirmary, where

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the poor Mildred now lay in one of her paroxyſms. Feeling my hot tears drop on her face, ſhe openeth her eyes, and gazing on me with an intenſe-like love and gratitude, ſaith, "Sweet angel!" But I for myſelf was a-weeping.

But this was my beſt place. I held unto her till ſhe died; and thereon returned to the ſcriptorium, and completed for king Alfred a copy of the Goſpel of St. John, the reading whereof for the firſt time was to my ſoul's immortal good. Howbeit, I marvelled to find therein no word of abbeys nor monaſteries, nor of the celibate life, and ſpake thereof unto the confeſſor: but he ſaid St. John's was a ſupplementary goſpel, very good and profitable as far as it went; but wanting in many particulars I ſhould find in the other goſpels. So I took his word for it, having no help for it, and learned of St. John all I could till I had attained unto the peruſal of the other goſpels, which occurred not until I had taken the black veil; and then, though I found therein no warrant for the celibate ſtate, I had no help for it, and was forced to hope that, though they ſanctioned it not, they would not have forbidden it.

Now this my manuſcript, being of a far dif-

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ferent execution from the Pſalter formerly mentioned, gave the king great contentation, and he cauſed it to be encloſed in a golden caſe, with precious ſtones beſet, which, he ſaid, was, after all, but a poor huſk for ſo rich a kernel. The firſt page was in gold capitals on a pale lilac ground; the ſecond in gold capitals on a dark blue ground.[1] This labour occupied nearly the entirety of my year's novitiate, and, there being then no queſtion whether or no I ſhould profeſs, I took the vows with all the privacy and ſolemnity thereto belonging. My nine days' retreat found me in a quieter and more ſolemnized ſtate of mind than when I was wavering between one courſe and another. I confeſſed, as before death, unto the biſhop, and received pontifical abſolution. The day was uſhered in by the tolling of the great bell muffled, as if I were in very deed dead; then enſued high maſs, the celebrants and altar all in black. While the requiem was a-ſinging, the mothers and ſiſters drew nigh the ſanctuary, each bearing a lighted taper. I proſtrated myſelf on a black cloth, mine arms extended as if on a croſs, during the

[1] Vide Cott. MSS. Tit. A. 2: a copy of the Goſpels that belonged to Athelſtan.

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litany for the dead. Then the biſhop removed my white veil, and I retired into the ſacriſty, where my head was ſhaven. Then my head was covered, and I returned unto the biſhop, who bleſſed my black veil and my coif. The holy mother produced the parchment inſcribed with my vows, which I repeated in a low voice only to be heard by the biſhop and herſelf, he holding the hoſt before me, to repreſent the very perſon of Chriſt, to whom I was now giving myſelf for ever. Then I ſigned the parchment on my knees; and the holy mother ſigned it; and then the biſhop covered me with the black veil, and gave me the hoſt; and I kiſſed the holy mother's feet, and we ſang "Domine, non ſum dignus." Thenceforth I was called mother.

This was another ſtep, and a very awful one in my life. I was not yet nineteen years of age, but I ſeemed to have left the world many years. Sometimes that appeared a dream, ſometimes this; but I clave to Chriſt all I could, only that what were meant for my helps ſometimes proved my hindrances. And now and then the queſtion aroſe, Do we love Chriſt the more for ſeeing the world *through a black veil?* However, while we continue in the body, the veil muſt in

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many things remain on our hearts. Queſtionleſs, the world will look ſmall enough, anywiſe, when we come to leave it.

My experiences, ſearching as they were, were preſently exchanged for thoſe of another ſort, by the unexpected demiſe of the holy mother. She was of middle age, hale and hearty; but, one faſt day, ſhe ate too freely of a raw ſallet, which ſhe wiſt full well her ſtomach could not bear. Well-a-day! we all have our temptations, and we know we are not to abide here for ever; and ſhe had the uſe of the bleſſed crucifix that came from Rome, too late for Mildred; nevertheleſs, it ſaved her not from ſtrong ſpaſms and convulſions. Wherefore I, ſetting no great ſtore by the ſame when it came into my poſſeſſion, made a preſent of it to one who thought more of it, and who, on any wiſe, is the happier for it while ſhe liveth, whatever eaſe it may give her at her death.

In ſome meaſure unto my ſurpriſe, I found myſelf unanimouſly elected abbatiſſa in the late holy mother's place. There was, indeed, none other nun among the ſiſterhood ſo well born, ſo well endowed with goods, nor ſo generally beloved; and I had always ſuppoſed I ſhould

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eventually be abbeſs of Shafteſbury; but there were ſo many elder women than I, who had been a long time in the convent, that I was taken at unawares, and much ſtartled at my new poſition. Though deſiring free action and authority, I found myſelf unprepared, and gave myſelf much unto prayer. Five abbeſſes were preſent at my conſecration, which was very impoſing; and in private they favoured me with the reſults of their own experiences on many matters, ſome of which I found profitable, others not. The nuns offered me their homage with a heartineſs that was genuine enough, for they concluded, from my youth and inexperience, they ſhould enjoy ſome abatements to their rule. Howbeit, I paſſed the entirety of ſundry days and nights in retreat, faſting, praying, and reflecting; and having at length made out my future courſe, I proceeded to work it out, in the manner I ſhall record in my next book, which I am ſtedfaſtly purpoſed ſhall be my laſt, and wherein I ſhall have ſomething moving to relate, touching our ſalvation from great danger by Alfred the king.

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BOOK VI.

WHEN I, Ethelfled, conſider in my mind how ſhort a thing is life, it meſeemeth we need not to be in ſo great a hurry as we often are to get over the intermediate points between one deſired period of it and another. Here had I been impatient enough, I trow, to find myſelf abbeſs of Shafteſbury; and now that I was elected abbeſs of Wareham I found myſelf taken by ſurpriſe. Therefore it was that for ſeveral days I ſhut myſelf up in ſtrict retreat, bearing in mind that great reſponſibilities require great preparations, even though habitual preparedneſs be not a-wanting. There muſt be ſolemn intercourſe with ourſelves and our Maker, with which our neareſt, deareſt friends intermeddle not. In this my retreat, ſtrange unaccuſtomed feelings aroſe, ſuch as I had not known when I took the white and black veils: and I found

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my thoughts and desires taking quite a new bent, and the movements of my will tending quite another way; until, I suppose, my whole internal being underwent some change, the character and amount of which I was not fully sensible of at the time; nor, I think, have ever been, till now that I come to look back.

From this season I had no more dreams and visions and contentions with enemies unspeakable: I found I was awake, and felt I must be doing.

It was dinner time, and on a fast day, when I left my retreat and took the abbess's place at table. Every eye was fixed on me. It fell that day that our fish was not dressed with the usual care: howbeit, I made no comment, but ate thereof sparingly and without egg sauce, to which the others helped themselves plentifully. The novice, whose turn it was to read, delivered to us the life of Egbert the priest, who lived upon bread and milk; and I was musing thereon after she had come to an end, without witting that all had finished, when suddenly becoming aware that from me was expected a benediction, I with some fervour ejaculated the ceorl's grace, "Thanks be to God for my good dinner." And

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immediately noting thereupon a general ſmile, if not on the lips yet in the eyes of all preſent, I looked at them ſtedfaſtly, and with great deliberateneſs and determination repeated, "Children, let us thank God for our good dinner!" and then pronounced the Latin benediction. Every eye ſank before mine.

Then I went to the late abbeſs's cell, which I intended thenceforth to make mine own; and I directed that the feather-ſtuffed bed, with hryfte, beadreafes, hoppſcytan, and all that thereto belonged, ſhould be carried into the infirmary for the uſe of the ſick; contenting myſelf with mine old hard pallet, without either pallia or cortinas. Then I went into the holy mother's parlour, where there were many papers to be read and deſtroyed; and therein I found ſome things that liked me, and ſome that liked me not. While thus buſied, with a fire of billets burning on the hearth, ſome one tapped at the door, and, at my bidding, came in and kneeled humbly on the ground. I ſaid, "Riſe, daughter;" and ſhe got off her knees, and with many ſelf-abaſings drew nigh unto me and kiſſed the hem of my garment. I concluded ſome great matter was in hand; but it was to

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tell me of an intolerable odour in her cell, which had long, ſhe thought, endangered her health. I told her ſhe might exchange it for the cell I had juſt left; and ſo continued my affairs.

Next day this ſiſter, whoſe name was Hæburge,[1] preſented herſelf anew, and with ſtill multiplying genuflexions, repreſented that in her new cell there was a draught, ſaving my holy preſence, that was enough to blow her head off. I regarded her keenly; but, remembering to have heard her once complain of the tooth-ache, I told her that ſhe might remove my bed into my old cell, and have the abbeſs's cell herſelf.

The nuns now thought they had only to aſk and have; and ſiſter Selethryth[2] next preſented herſelf to inform me that ſhe was quite loſing her hand for paſtry, and opined that we had better eat placentas daily than that ſhe ſhould loſe her cunning. Alſo, to ſuggeſt that broths or ſoups ſhould be ſerved on Wedneſdays and Fridays in addition to eggs, lentils, cheeſe, and buttermilk; and that we ſhould have gaudy

[1] The Anglo-Saxon nuns do not ſeem to have adopted new names on their profeſſion. We read in Bede of Tortgith, Edith, Coenberg, &c.

[2] Good-threatener: a Saxon female name.

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days on other feſtivals beſides Eaſter and Whitſuntide. Unto this I Ethelfled would not incline mine ear, no, not for a moment; and thereafter I began to manifeſt unto them that gentleneſs was no proof of weakneſs. To their obedience I kept them up; and I alſo ſet myſelf, like Nehemiah, ſon of Hachaliah, to rectify certain abuſes. It had been well for me Ethelfled, had I only applied myſelf to eſſential reforms: howbeit, I was but young yet. I have beforetime ſaid that the barbarous ſinging of the ſiſters had all along been very grievous unto me; being very little removed from the ſqueaſing of cats. I now took them ſeriouſly to taſk on this matter, and told them how detrimental it was to devotion: but my lecture was only received with ſulky looks. Nevertheleſs, I was purpoſed to carry this matter through; and, being myſelf gifted with an harmonious voice and a competent knowledge of muſic, I made uſe of the firſt holiday to call the ſiſters together and give them a little inſtruction. Herein I Ethelfled was ſore let, as well by their obſtinacy as ſtupidity. Siſter Selethryth, in eſpecial, upon my inſiſting on her bringing forth a note which I wiſt was within her compaſs, would ſing flatter and flatter,

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and, at the laſt, let fly her voice with ſuch deſperation that it cracked, and produced ſuch a miſerable ſqueak, that ſiſter Wynfreda, in deſpite of herſelf, burſt forth into laughing. When was ſuch indecorum heard of? All the reſt, ſeeing my heightened colour, were ſore ydrad, witting there was no other portion for ſiſter Wynfreda than dry cruſts and a dark cell: but it was againſt ſiſter Selethryth, not ſiſter Wynfreda, that my wrath was enkindled; and upon my rebuking her very warmly for her miſdeeds, ſhe waxed ſo rebellious and violent, that for the ſake of common order and diſcipline, I was conſtrained to put her in bonds. By force ſhe was removed into a dark cell, ſhe ſtruggling all the way thither moſt outrageouſly, and ſmiting ſiſter Wynfreda on the eye. Bread and water was her diet, (it was cheeſecake day too!) our ſupper was eaten ſadly, and I Ethelfled ſhut myſelf within my chamber to muſe in bitterneſs of ſpirit on broken rule and deſpiſed authority. I was all weakneſs and ignorance, but I wiſt where was all wiſdom and ſtrength; and was ſeeking thereunto, when, lo! I heard a horn wind outſide the gate. Alfred the king had come down to conſider the defences of the caſtle, and had ridden

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over to ſee how I fared, and give me greeting. Never was freondlic word more pleaſant! I received him with tears in mine eyes: he marvelled thereat, and would wit why they were a-ſhedding. Thereupon we had a long colloquy, which was of the greateſt moment to me in the conduct of mine after life. He thought me much leſs to be blamed than I thought myſelf; indeed, brake forth into laughing when he heard the origin of the offence; howbeit, he admitted the conſequences were grievous, and muſt be remedied. To clear myſelf, albe he ſaid I needed no clearing, I ſummoned ſiſter Wynfreda, the novice, to do him to wit of all had happened. Her fears had blanched her chubby cheeks and ycloſed her mouth as tight as a button; by reaſon of which, when ſhe had departed, the king ſaid, "*Can* that girl ever laugh? I could hardly take her own word for it."

Thereafter the culprit herſelf was brought into his preſence, trembling like an aſpen leaf; ſo as that her guards were little wanted. The king looked as grave as though he were in the witena-gemot. Quoth he, "I had no knowledge until juſt now how hard a woman could hit . . . thou muſt have miſtaken thy vocation, and

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ſhouldſt rather have helped me fight the Danes. Wonderlike it is to me Alfred, that any born a woman ſhould within her heart find it to give reaſon of diſquiet to one ſo young, ſo gentle, and ſo worthy of all honour as this holy mother. I Alfred, cyning, have known her ever ſince ſhe was a child, and know no one, a woman born, ſo worthy to be loved, ſave her own ſiſter, my wife. Believe me, ye are favoured among women to have ſuch a mother for your abudiſſe, whoſe ſingular genius and acquired learning (nay, I Ethelfled muſt not truſt myſelf to recal all this . . . ,) and who is not only holy, but high-born, not only learned, but ranclike, who refuſed wonderlike good offers of marriage that ſhe might wholly give herſelf to heaven, and whoſe fame for ſanctity and book-lere is beginning to be noiſed abroad in foreign parts. To conclude, I Alfred, king, am fully perſuaded in my own mind that if ye will but give yourſelves wholly and with one heart unto the direction of your holy mother, there is little queſtion of your ſiſterhood becoming the moſt famous, not alone in England, but in Chriſtendom, to ſay nothing of the more eminent among you being canonized hereafter. And to further and promote

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this moſt deſired end, it needeth nought but that ye ſhould obſerve implicit obedience, unlimited good humour, holy temperance, continual quietneſs, ſteady induſtry, ſincere piety, and take diligent heed unto your copybooks.[1] You, priſoner at the door, commonly known as Selethryth, or the good-threatener, I have deſired your holy mother, who is long ſuffering and ſoon pacified, to overlook this once your unpardonable offence, on condition of ſincere penitence and a week's entire ſilence. And now let us to prayers."

The king went with us to veſpers, and ſang loudly and cheerily: I did my beſt to imitate his example; the poor ſiſters ſang like mice in a cheeſe, but more tuneably than aforetime; and the ſervice was very refreſhing and compoſing to us all. Then the king ordered his horſe to be brought, ſaying, "I ſhall not now inſiſt on the board and lodging for three days, you owe me for that parcel of land."[2] And he vouchſafed to taſte our placentas; and as he departed, ſaid, ſo that I only could hear, "Farewell, Ethelfleda: I ſhall now return to Wincheſter, and

[1] i.e. Waxed tablets.

[2] A common condition under the Saxon kings, when the abbeys were the only places of reception for travellers.

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tell Ethelfwitha I left your face two inches ſhorter than I found it. My good little abbeſs! you have been early ſet in authority over an intractable community; but be brave, be conſtant, be prayerful, and all will be well."

Thereon the king departed, leaving a freſhneſs and gladneſs behind him like as we find in the green woods and freſh air and ſunſhine. Methought it much kindneſs for him to ſpeak ſo well of me in hearing of my nuns; and from this time there was nothing among them but cheerfulneſs and obedience. Shortly there arrived from the king a preſent of waxed tablets and poyntels,[1] for the uſe of the ſiſters who would apply themſelves to write; but I grieve to ſay, that after much trouble, there was not one among them that attained unto the pen of a ready writer. This is, no queſtion, a gift from above: it comes not to all: therefore I was fain to let them apply themſelves unto that for which they truly ſeemed to have capacity, to wit, their needles, rather than to labour painfully at that for which they had no true vocation.

As about this time, departed holy Neot, and went to glory. Verily he was a rihtwiſe and

[1] Iron pens.

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ſaintly man, if ever there was one. He was born to kingly rule, and might have worn a crown; howbeit, he would not, leſt the world ſhould be too great a ſnare unto him. Yet, and if all our good men were to ſhut themſelves up, what manner of rulers ſhould we have? Howbeit, Neot ruled the ruler, ever and anon, even after his death, as will be related hereafter. He took the cowl at Glaſtonbury; ſeven times viſited Rome, and, in concluſion, getymbrade a monaſtery. One feature of his was notable: he would try to ſingle out the beſt qualities of his brethren, and unite them all in himſelf: as, the holineſs of one, the patience of another; howbeit, he might have found them all in our Lord.

But now come I to our great and dreadful peril. The Danes, under Guthrum, who had abode in Cambridge by the ſpace of twelve months, now prepared themſelves for action, as the manner of their nation is, by laſhing up their paſſions with dreadful howlings, claſhing their ſwords, clanging their ſhields, and pranſing hither and thither like ſo many mad creatures. It might very well have been foreboded that this would take place, ſo ſoon as the fighting ſeaſon commenced: howbeit, we Engliſh, according to

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our wont, had deſpiſed the danger while it was a little way off, and ſate by our hearths, roaſting apples and drinking hot ale all the winter. And if any one ventured to remark, "The Danes are coming!" the only anſwer he had for his pains was, "Oh, they are, are they?—Only let them, I ſay!" And ſo we went on in this ungodly ſtate of ſecurity, (for why ſhould God help thoſe who were ſo little troubled to help themſelves?) And the king, now and then, thought he ſhould do ſomething, but wiſt not how he ſhould do it: and ſo it came to paſs, the Danes entered into their ſhips and ſet ſail for Wareham!

I remember it was St. Matthias's Eve . . . I was looking forth of my lattice at the two days old moon, and the great planet Jupiter a-ſhining above him,[1] as it were a ſtone's caſt . . . when I became ware of a fierce red light ſuddenly upburning from ſome diſtant village. Anon, a herdſman's horn windeth clamorouſly at our gate; and the portreſs tells me a poor ſwain craveth immediate ſpeech of me; ſo I deſcended unto him, foreboding evil. He was a rough,

[1] The Saxon moon was maſculine.

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ſimple ſerf, all apant with haſte; and thus unto me he ſpake:—

"At ſunſet drave I my flocks to fold. I tarried on the top of the cliff, and looked acroſs the ſea. Then ſaw I what ſeemed a little white cloud, no bigger than my hand, a riſing from the ſea. Preſently ſeven ſail were ſhining in the ſun. At length I counted thirty. Then fled I to give alarm; but my knees trembled, and my tongue clave to the roof of my mouth. The ſwains gathered to look out, but what could they do? Some fled inland to ſpread the wail, ſome to drive off their ceap,[1] ſome to carry their wives and their children to the caſtle. Meantime landed the Danes. They ſwarmed like bees; they aſcended the cliffs like graſshoppers; they brake not their ranks, they went forward every man on his ways, with his ſhield over his head. Like the noiſe of a flame of fire that devoureth the ſtubble was the hum of their voices. They encloſed and drave before them not a handful of ſheep or kine, but whole herds and flocks, to feed thereof. By reaſon of their

[1] Cattle. Hence our milk-maids ſtill ſummon their cows by calling, "Cup! cup!"

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numbers the land gathered blackneſs. They burned our thorp, and all the ſouls that were therein. Next they will come to the caſtle and the abbey. And now, holy mother, take thought what you ſhall do; for who ſhall deliver you out of their hands?"

I ſaid, "Go and ſend me Eadwulf, my land bailiff. And let all that are in diſtreſs, and all that are homeleſs, and all that are frightened, come within our precincts as faſt as they can; and we will do our beſt for one another." Then I gave him a thrymſa,[1] and a drink of warm ale, for his ſoul was fainting within him. And his ſpirit returned unto him, and he went forth; and the bell rang us to night prayer.

So ſoon as the keys were laid on the altar, and the nuns were in their cells, I gat me into the chapel, and lay down on my face before the altar, and prayed hard, and wept ſore. And I ſaid, Ah, Lord God, have mercy on us; have mercy on Thy people England, and ſhow this time what is the difference between a people that prayeth and a people that prayeth not! Come among us, and with great might ſuccour us, becauſe there is none that fighteth for us but

[1] A fourpenny-piece.

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only Thou, O Lord! Wherefore ſhould the Danes ſay, Where is now their God?

Before glomung,[1] the next morning, the poor people came flocking unto us, ſome with a few ſheep and cattle, ſome with only a pig or an aſs, or a couple of hens, ſome with only the clothes on their backs, to take ſhelter within the precincts. Not that there was much ſafety to be expected within them: for our houſe, as I have elſewhere ſaid, was chiefly getymbrade, and at the mercy of the firſt brand; but it made a ſort of rallying point; the caſtle being already over-full: and ſome of the dwellers in lone foreſt booths and ſhepherds' huts had a notion, falſe enough, that the pagans would reverence holy ground; others, more juſtly, thought God would care for His own, and be our buckler of defence: others had pity for us, and reſolved to make common cauſe and fight for us, along with their own wives and children. And thus it fell, that the ſpace encloſed with paliſades round about our houſe, which might be as it were an half-acre, that a yoke of oxen might plough, was preſently brim-full of women, children, and confuſed live ſtock; while, without the ſtakes, on the only ſide that

[1] Dawn; gloaming.

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had no natural defence from the confluence of the two rivers, the men drew up, undiſciplined and ill-armed enough, but ſtaunch to a man, and ready to die at their poſts ere an evil ſhould happen unto us. But what were they againſt ſo many? And how wiſt I that the Lord's purpoſe would be to deliver us out of the hands of the heathen, any more than he had delivered any of the monaſteries all along the eaſtern coaſt? I thought of Croyland; and how the grey-haired abbot was ſlain before the altar, the prior in the veſtry, the ſub-prior in the refectory: only a little child ſurvived to tell the tale. I thought of Peterborough, with its abbey and its library, the glory of the age, for fifteen days a burning: the abbot and monks all ſlain. I thought of the nuns of Ely, who disfigured their faces, that they might aſtonie the Danes, who, indeed, fled away to a man; but not before they had ſet fire to the monaſtery and burned every ſoul alive. And now, here were theſe very Danes, headed by the ſelfsame chiefs, Guthrum, Amund, and Oſkitul, maſters and adepts in cruelty and rapine, within our ſight, and even our hearing; for we could catch the faint rumour as of the yelling of a pack of fox-

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hounds in ſome far-off upland, and now and then a huntſman's whoop, and a long, ſhrilling cry. And this ſet all the blood-hounds and wolf-hounds within our precincts baying ready to ſplit their throats, and ſtraining againſt their leaſhes; and the oxen lowing, and the porkers grunting, and the ſheep bleating, and the infants wailing, and the mothers weeping and wiſhing there had been room for them in the caſtle. Theſe latter I gave in charge to the nuns, to foſter and comfort, and thereby divert their thoughts from their own ſtrait a little; for, in ſooth, they were ſore beſted; and many a white and many a black veil was quivering with fears that could not be ſtayed. I bade them be much in prayer: for myſelf, I ſtood on the wall, right over the gate, and prayed at my poſt; receiving news ever and anon, from ſome freſh ſcout; and now and then intermitting my prayer for the help of God with a paſſing wiſh for a little more help of man. For I could not help noting, with ſome bitterneſs of heart, that not a fighting man had come to our aid but ſuch as were under my own juriſdiction; all the reſt having doubtleſs muſtered at the caſtle, which truly could make a better defence, but which therefore was all the

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leſs in need of them. Such are men, whom we women ſo often love more than we love God. But mark the iſſue! *The caſtle fell!* The Danes ſlew all the ſouls that were therein: they thereby obtained the command of the whole country round about; and the ſcouts brought news that, after carouſing for a while, and emptying the caſtle larder and butteries, they were purpoſing to march upon us. Now aroſe one univerſal wail,—who can wonder thereat? Even Eadwulf turned red, and then white. . . . I have always forgotten to find a convenient place for ſaying, that my foſter-father, having been ſent on a ſpecial meſſage to me juſt at the time our land-ſteward died, I had, to Eadwulf's great advantage and mine own, made him his ſucceſſor. We now ſtood together on the wall: anon we ſee a great duſt, and the glitter of ſpears and boſſy ſhields. Preſently the pagans were loſt in a thicket. We were all praying hard, within and without the houſe; but it ſeemed the will of God we ſhould be loſt. Still I bare in mind, that it was as eaſy to Him to ſave by few as by many; the laſt moment, as the firſt; by a rumour among the mulberry-trees, or by the breaking of a few earthen

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pitchers.[1] And I thought, Is His arm ſhortened, that it cannot ſave? May it not be His good pleaſure to help us? But my ſenſes were ſo quickened by the immediate preſence of danger, that I think I could have heard a cock crow, or have ſeen a ſunbeam light a weathercock twenty miles off. I heard Eadwulf mutter between his teeth, "I can die for her, but that won't ſave her!" .... and he looked down the wall, and then quickly at me, as much as to ſay, "Shall we caſt ourſelves down headlong together?" But this was a ſuggeſtion of the evil one, for there were others within the houſe as defenceleſs as myſelf, and depending on me for protection; and I looked ſtedfaſtly away from him with mine eyes towards the wood, whence I expected each moment to ſee iſſuing the Danes. I heard him give a great ſigh; but the next moment he uttered a loud cry, and, plucking me by the ſleeve, pointed towards the Trent. Shading our eyes with our hands from the rays of the declining ſun, we could make out a diſtant troop of horſemen advancing upon us from that direction, juſt as the firſt glimmer of ſpears ſhowed the Danes emerging from the

[1] Judges vii. 20.

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wood. We ſeemed hemmed in on either ſide! I cried aloud, "Heaven help us!"—but the ſame moment, Eadwulf, his face all a-blaze, ſhouts, "Praiſe the Lord, 'tis the king!" And ſo it was; and ſo Heaven *did* help us. We heard them from afar give three jolly Engliſh cheers —And did not our men cheer too?

I Ethelfled can never dwell on that reſcue without wet eyes.[1] From what a ſtrait did the king that day work deliverance for me and the poor ſiſters! . . . . Ew! how he and his men laid it on, and drove the villain pagans right into and acroſs the Frome! At his feet they dropped, they fell; where they dropped down there they lay dead. The lean wolf and the hungry vulture rejoiced. It was a great, a deadly ſlaughter; yea, they took much prey. The king was a mighty wind, that diſperſed the clouds like miſt: they rolled from the ſide of the hills, and the valleys laughed and ſang. How his ſword leaped out of his ſcabbard! he loved to defend the weak. The field was ſtrawed for miles with ſpears and cloven ſhields. He chaſed them back to the

[1] Aſſer merely ſays, "They (the Danes) left Cambridge for Wareham, where was a nunnery, between the Frome and Trent, ſecure on all ſides but one. Here Alfred made them ſwear on the Chriſtian relics," &c.

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towers that roſe on the rocky banks. Even here his hand did not leave them, nor his right hand ceaſe to hold them, till they ſware on his holy ring, the ring of the holy croſs. Then he left them cowed and aſtonied, and returned with his warriors by night. And we went forth and ſang jubilate, and ſpread him a feaſt of our beſt.

* * * * *

But what cared thoſe unrihtwiſe pagans for ſwearing on his holy ring, yea, or on their own bracelets, which they held much more ſacred, or for breaking the holy truth, which they held not ſacred on any wiſe? Had they kept it, they would have belied their own nature, which was akin to all evil. They attacked an outlying party of the king's horſemen the very ſame night, while we were making merry and giving of thanks within doors; and making off in the dark, they conveyed themſelves to Exeter, whence the king in vain ſtrove to diſlodge them.

And now commenced the ſorrowfulleſt ſeaſon that England ever knew. Alas, my brother! would that I could have aided thee! or that the ſpirit of wiſdom, and diſcretion, and ſtrength, had been in thee, to know what to do, and to do it! Then, after the year of Seven Battles, thou wouldſt not have been ſeven years a fugitive and

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a wanderer on the face of the earth, hunted like a partridge on the mountains, a ſteorleſs feolun, like David, the ſon of Jeſſe, in the wilderneſs; thy dwelling with the wild beaſts of the field, and thy body wet with the dews of heaven, like unto the great king of Babylon. Oh! then was fulfilled the dark ſaying of Neot, that thou ſhouldſt be humbled and brought low. Thy people witted not what had become of thee, and were as ſilly ſheep lacking a ſhepherd, or as pigeons frighted from the corn. For their ſtrength and their hope had periſhed from the Lord. His hand was not ſhortened, that it could not ſave; but our iniquities had ſeparated between us and our God. Therefore He removed every ſtronghold as it were a tent that a man wrencheth up the pegs thereof; He tore up our homes as one eaſily draweth herbs out of the garden when the mould is wet with dew: He gave up the walls of our palaces into the hands of the enemy, and let our young men and maidens perish by the ſword. We were a very ſcorn unto our foes, and a deriſion to thoſe that were round about us. For this cauſe, our eyes ran down with water, and our cheeks were fouled with weeping. The ſound of the harp and the

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rote was no more heard: the mirth of the land was gone. Eaſter was as ſorrowful as Lent, and there was no merriment at Yule. The grape remained uncruſhed: the ungathered apple dropped from the bough. The foxes might break the hedges, there was no man cared to ſnare them; the wolves might prowl round our folds, there was no man had ſpirit to ſlay them; the rooks might prey on the corn, there was no one minded to ſcare them. Men ſate by the hearth and ſighed; or ſpake ſhort, like a ſavage growl. They longed to unite and make head: and their thought was, Where is the king?

My father was ſtill at Rome; ſo my mother took ſhelter with me. How ſweet to have a refuge to offer my bleſſed mother! We were in a leſs defenceleſs ſtate than when the Danes took us at unawares; for our poor houſe had been much repaired and ſtrengthened by my direction; and whereas our paliſades were better for keeping nuns in than for keeping pagans out, the king, ere he departed from our coaſts, gave commandment that a good ſtone wall ſhould be getymbrade about us, on our weakeſt ſide. Indeed, this made our dwelling leſs cheerful, but far more ſecure; and the king, to ſhow

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how ſafe he held us to be, ſent us ſundry heavy cheſts, with cords well cnytted round them, containing I know not what, but, doubtleſs, plate and bags of treaſure and goodly raiment; ſince we were to have them in ſtrict charge, and they have never been claimed yet.

About this time, the following ſong was much in the mouths of the people:—

"What ſeekeſt thou in the brake? The blue eggs of the bulfinch.
What ſeekeſt thou in the brake? The blue flowers of the ſpeedwell.
What ſeekeſt thou in the brake? The blue eyes of the king.
What look ye for i' th' air? The path of a ſwallow.
What look ye for i' th' air? The riſing of a lark.
What look ye for i' th' air? The flight of a king's arrow.
Never yet look'd I for an eagle in a marle-pit,
Nor for a curlew's neſt in a green ſhaw.
But yet in a foreſt have I ſeen a burnt ſpot where a king hath dreſſ'd his meat."

Thus their very ſongs were ſorrowings, and their ſpeech lamentings. For ourſelves, we were ſhut in ſo cloſe, that we were ſometimes a long while without hearing aught of what was befalling, ſave from pilgrims, wayfarers, and the like, whom we hoſpitably entreated.

One day, a ſtranger, ragged, and with bleeding feet, came to the gate to crave an alms, and whileas he was yet ſpeaking, he fell ſtraightway all along upon the earth, by reaſon of his ſtrength

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failing him through travel and much faſting. We had him into the hoſpitium, and I waſhed his feet myſelf; and when his ſpirit returned unto him, I fed him with bread and wine. Then I ſought of him news of the king; and thereupon, thus he ſpake:—

"I was ſent by a choſen few to ſeek the king. Him ſought I in Athelney. We would wit were he ſtill alive, or muſt we chooſe us another king. Therefore diſguiſed I myſelf, with clipped hair like a ſerf's, and I fouled my face and my hands, and went ragged and barefoot. I tracked him into the remote weſt, into a land of marſhes and fens and ſtagnant waters. But I found not the hare in his form, neither the fox in his cover. One day an arrow whiſtled paſt me, and a man ruſhed after a fawn. I ſaw him anon through the buſhes, and thought it was the king. I followed by ſtealth on his track: he had the fawn on his ſhoulders, and he made his way through the briers, down to the edge of a lake. There he untied a ſhallop, and ferried himſelf acroſs. Then I followed the banks of the lake, till at length I came to a ford; I got acroſs to the iſland, which was all in a tangle of wood. Many animals of the harmleſs ſort were in it: I came

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upon goats, kids, and hares. I diſturbed ſundry pheaſants, and heard the whirr of partridges. Anon I come to a glade, and ſee a woman milking a goat. She was wonderlike to look on for beauty: I knew her to be the queen. She carried her creche within-doors, into a little wattled cot. Then ſtole I up to the door, that was only ſparred with a latch. I heard ſome one withinſide reading; it ſeemed me, a godly book. The reader's voice was ſo pleasant, I would fain have liſted all night. Then I heard a young infant weeping, and the mother checked it, and ſaid, 'You brat, if you wail ſo loudly, I will give you to the Danes!' But ſhe ſmothered its cries with kiſſes, and the reader went on with his book. Another man's voice now ſounded, and I heard him ſay, 'My king! there is little meat on this fawn, now I have ſkinned it.' Then he, I now knew for the king, made laughing anſwer, and ſaid, 'Then you and I, my thegn, muſt eat the leſs, for I ſwear I'll hunt no more to-day.' Methought he was then ſtepping forth, ſo I raiſed the latch and begged. Wonderlike looked they all, and ſaid, 'What, are we found out *here?*' And the king held ſome parley with me; but I let him not wit who I was. I begged

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for a morſel of bread; and the king bade the thegn fetch a loaf. Quoth the thegn, 'We have but one left, and this we can ſcarcely ſpare.' Saith the king, 'This poor knave needs it moſt; I am minded that he ſhall have half. Oh that all the wants of my people could be in like manner ſupplied!' So he brake the loaf in twain . . . It was one of the loaves they call loudas. And I bleſſed him once and again. I was nigh ſaying ſomething, but did not. My purpoſe thus far was fulfilled. I had learnt where abode the king. So I ſped towards thoſe who had ſent me; but fell among thieves by the way. There was nothing they found to take from me, ſo they beat me and left me alone. But my ſtrength was almoſt ſpent, and I think you have ſaved my life. I was bitter in heart when I found him with his fair wife and his friend in the hunter's booth. But my heart melted when he ſpake of his people, for I ſaw a tear in his eye: and methought ſomething heavenlike within him was made known in his breaking of bread."

Now, from what I afterwards learned, it appeared that this thegn, for he was no leſs, returned unto thoſe who had ſent him, and made

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known unto them where he had found the king. Whereon they reſorted unto him in the Royal Iſland, or Iſle of Nobles, as it was afterwards indifferently called, and plighting anew their fealty, aided him their beſt to conſtruct a place of ſafety, whence they might iſſue continually to haraſs the Dane. Sometimes they gat the better, ſometimes the worſe: but, on any wiſe, they returned, untracked, to their ſtronghold, which beginning to be wotted of by them that were faithful, their party waxed ſtronger and ſtronger. They made a rough bridge to the iſlet, on which they getymbrade two towers. Meantime, news was brought to the king of the movements of the Danes; but as the ſpies' reports agreed not always together, he wanted to have more certitude thereof.

One evening, when the days were lengthening, but ſtill cold, I was ſitting by the light of a fire of billets, when the portreſs uſhered in, without a word, a tall, dark figure, clad in minſtrel faſhion, with a harp at his back, and holding by the hand a moſt ſweet little child, ſome five years old, with fair hair falling all over her ſhoulders. I knew him at once for the king. After our firſt gladlike greeting, he ſaid, "I

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come, Ethelfleda, to put under your ſafeguard our little Ethelgiva, who is minded to be with you as long as you will keep her; and her mother's wiſh and mine is, that you make her as much like yourſelf as you can." Then he ſet down his harp and warmed his hands, and dried his hair, which was wet with ſpring rain; and he ſaid, "The time is now come to do ſomething, and I hope to find how to do it. I am bound for the Daniſh camp." I ſaid, "Ah, my brother, go not alone amid thoſe fell Danes!" and forebore not to weep. But he anſwered and ſaid, "If thou wouldſt have a thing half done, truſt it to thy neighbour; if thou wouldſt have it whole done, do it thyſelf. I am weary of my life, with doing nothing to purpoſe for my people. And now I will muſter them at a ſet place, and lead them to victory, or die. I have dreamed of holy Neot, who ſtood by me, and ſaid, 'Up, why ſleepeſt thou? behold, the ſet time is come.' So fill me a cup of wine, my ſiſter; and weep not to break my heart."

Then, to cheer me and make me of good courage, he told me how brave-hearted and helpful Ethelſwitha had been; and for all the lowlineſs and incertitude of their living in

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Athelney, how pleaſantlike it had been to harbour with her under the green boughs. "Only," quoth he, "I heard my people's cry in mine ears, day and night." And he told me what pains he had been at to find the place; and how he had carried Ethelſwitha acroſs to it on his ſhoulder.

"Before I found it," quoth he, "a man found me ſtraying on the dun.[1] He aſked me who I was, and what I ſought. I told him I ſerved the king, who had juſt been beaten, and I was looking for ſhelter. Thereon he took me home, to a herdman's ruſtic cot. They gave me food and lodging. I abode with them certain days. When the ſwain, whoſe name was Denulf, had herded his ſwine, he came in and ſate by the fire, and, with acorns for counters, made reckonings. Thereon I laughed, and told him he ſhould be a clerc: peradventure he had been born for a biſhop.[2] He ſaid, 'Better be a herd that can herd his ſwine, than a king that cannot ſave his people. If a wolf attacks my pigs, I throw ſtones at him, and chaſe him away; which is

[1] Down.

[2] The king afterwards encouraged him to apply to letters, and finally made him Biſhop of Wincheſter.

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more than king Alfred does with the Dane.' One Sabbath morn, the man and his meowla would go forth, leaving certain cakes, well beſcwon and well geſyfled, a baking on a pan over the fire; and the good wyf me ſpake, 'Thou's nawt to tend ſave thine arrow an' thy baw: ſee to 't, lad, whenas t' one ſoid o' t' keaks is browned, an' turn them to teother.' But well-away, my thoughts to other matters fled, and the *keaks* were ſinged; and the wyf, coming back, ſtormed like a ſea-king, and ſmote one of mine ears and then the other. And, quoth ſhe, 'Couldn't thee moind the keaks, lad? Beſhrew thee for 't! thou loikes to eat them vaſt enow!'—I bare it meekly; only aſking her whether ſhe were of kin to Selethryth the nun."

Then we diſcourſed of ſundry matters pertaining unto the kingdom; and alſo unto this poor houſe. Then he took up his harp, and aroſe to depart, ſaying, "You ſhall ſoon hear good or ill tidings." I ſhowed him the ſtone wall, and ſaid, "Thou haſt enſafed us now, brother!" He gave it an earneſt look, and made anſwer, "Oh yes, you are now ſtrong enough: it may hap that I ſhall ſend you the queen." And, looking round about him, and

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then at me, he ſaid, "Thou'rt but young yet,—" gravelike: and, without another word, rode away. The place looked dull, in the duſk; and, juſt then, he thought me a blot.[1]

Or ere many ſuns had ſet, came the glad tidings that he had rallied his people in Selwood foreſt. At the ſtone of Egbert they met: a ſtone to be much ſet by. The news of his taking arms ſpread like wildfire; the people flocked unto him with gladneſs. Nothing was to be heard but horns, trumpets, and the ringing of arms. Two days continued the muſtering: on the third, the king led them forward. He inflamed their ſouls with his words; who can ſpeak like the king? They came at length on the foe, carouſing and making merry. Then, who ſhall tell what enſued? They fought beneath the king's eye. Firſt, the arrows flew like ſnow-flakes, then followed the lances; and, anon, each man was hewing at another with his ſword. As a ſtandard-bearer ruſhed paſt, the king, in his heat, cried, "See! Neot leads us!" and the cry ran from mouth to mouth. What remains to tell? The Danes were winnowed like chaff; the victory remained with the king.

[1] A victim.

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It was a day to be much remembered. The king followed hard after them to their ſtronghold, and beſieged them ſtraitly. Men from all quarters continued to flock to his ſtandard. The ſtronger waxed the king, the weaker waxed the Danes. Fourteen days they endured ſiege and great famine; then their ſouls were brought low, even the ſoul of Guthrum, and they ſued for the king's mercy.

Then Alfred the king bare in mind his old ſaying, that he would ſooner they were converted than confounded. And, having inſiſted on their ſubmiſſion to his will, whatſoever it ſhould be, he put them under a brief courſe of preparation, and aſſembling them nigh unto Athelney, he cauſed them to be admitted into the church by the holy waters of baptiſm. He himſelf ſtood ſponſor for Guthrum, who, with thirty chiefs, was baptized. It was a notable, a memorable day. For twelve days the feaſt aroſe.

I wot there was joy in heaven over that ſight; in ſpecial in the heart of holy Neot. The thing was done quickly. I had ſpeech of one of the prieſts afterwards, who took part in preparing the candidates. "There was not time," quo' he, "for many ſubtleties . . . . we juſt

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ſhowed them how they might be ſaved by Chriſt. We hammered that well into them, and let the reſt alone; for they were but poor, blind pagans." Thought I Ethelfled, ye might have done worſe.

When conventual and ſtate affairs called me to Wincheſter, I found houſes building and rebuilding on all ſides; not after the old, rickety faſhion, but good, ſubſtantial edifices of wood and ſtone. Every iſern-ſmith and treow-whirta[1] that was craftlike was ſecure of full employment and good wages. Gold-ſmiths, ſeolferſmiths, glaziers,[2] and artificers of every deſcription were in high requeſt; and in ſpite of the troubled times, many came from beyond ſeas. The certitude and readineſs of the king's payment made his integrity eſteemed of all. His credit ſtood high; for even kings are in good or bad credit, like the verieſt merchants, according as they pay their bills and keep their promiſes; and though there was at the outſet a hard run upon his exchequer, yet the money

[1] Blackſmith and carpenter, i.e. tree-worker.

[2] "Even in the ſeventh century, Boniface, abbot of Weremouth, procured men from France, who not only glazed church windows, but taught the Anglo-Saxons the art of making glaſs for windows, lamps, drinking veſſels, &c."—SHARON TURNER.

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went in a circle and came round again. For why? the iſern-ſmiths and ſtone-maſons being punctually paid, could in their turns pay for their meat and drink, inſtead of running up ſcores at the ale-thelun; the bakers, brewers, and ſo forth could pay their ſcores and fines in due ſeaſon, without reviling the collectors or ſlipping out of ſight to hide among their ſtuff; people that had buried their money and plate dug it up again; and thus, as I ſay, the coin of the realm was current, and the more fitly for being round inſtead of clipped, ran merrily back into the treaſury. "The rolling hælfling doubles as it goes." This is the true end and courſe of money, in purſuing which, it bleſſes both giver and receiver. And thus it fell, that all his doings being ordered in the ſame wiſe-like and honeſt ſpirit, the king came of all men to be relied on; and the confidence in him ſhortly became ſuch, that moſt, and at length all the Saxon kings round about him voluntarily put themſelves in ſubjection under him, and made him, in fine, head and maſter of all England. This bloodleſs victory over their hearts and minds was dearer to him, I wot, than many a victory over the Danes. He conquered the

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pagans by the aſſiſtance of others; he won his brother kings entirely by what he was.

Now the reſt of the acts of king Alfred, and the good deeds that he did, and the wiſe laws that he made, and the ſhips that he getymbrade; . . . . is it not all ſet down by Aſſer? Alſo, how he eſtabliſhed the Danes under Guthrum, in Eaſt Anglia, where they turned their ſwords into pruning-hooks, and cultivated the land, and would not countenance the freſh ſwarms of Danes that landed, and fought, and were beaten. Thereafter, the country had much proſperity. And Tinne the Corniſhman made this ſong, that was much ſung by the people:—

"Oh, England, know thy bleſſings! See! the Lord hath given thee a good king. The ceap feed in the paſtures; a little child may guard them. The girls may go to the wells: gold bracelets hang ſafe on the highways. The ſwains ſow corn in the ſpring, for they look to threſh it in winter. Set up the Maypole! ſet the cyder running! We are at peace and in ſafety; we, the happy ones! Deareſt men, praiſe the Lord. The monks may now fiſh up their church-plate from the water-pits: alſo the nuns may ſleep ſweetly in their cells. The wolf gnaws his own fore-foot, for there are no dead bodies. Wiſdom increaſeth, wealth increaſeth; let us glorify God. Oh, England, know thy bleſſings!"

Howbeit, the Canaanite is ſtill in the land. Of a verity, I thought when Guthrum was baptized, the kingdom of heaven was coming at laſt; but no, the ſet time was not come. Well, there is

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a Canaanite, too, in the little world of our own hearts, that will continue there ſo long as we are in the body: but it reſts with ourſelves whether to ſtarve or to pamper him. What remaineth to ſay? Alfred the king was twenty and eight years old when he returned unto his kingdom. That was ten years agone; and here am I, ſtill abbeſs of this poor houſe. Shafteſbury abbey is being getymbrade, but I doubt very much if I ſhall accept the mitre thereof; for I have become uſed to mine old quarters, though they are gloomy, and unto mine old nuns, though they are ſtupid. My rule is become popular, ſo that I have been conſtrained to refuſe many poſtulants, in ſpite of the new wing. Among the freſh comers have been one or two hopeful ones; and one or two, that for conſcience' ſake I have been conſtrained to recommend to return unto the world. One of theſe was a girl whom I found daſhing her head againſt a pillar, for that ſhe ſaid our rule was not hard enough. Afterwards ſhe was a prey to unaccountable diſeaſes, and one day fell to rolling herſelf very ſwiftly along the floor of the chapel, till ſhe reached the ſhrine of our patroneſs; when, with a deep ſigh, ſhe exclaimed, "Now, praiſe to St. Audrey, I am

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cured!" Many would have made a miracle of it, which indeed was what ſhe wanted; but I am, it may be, even too hard of belief in ſuch events, unleſs undeniably authenticated; and as the girl proved a deceiver, I was glad the thing was done in a corner. Alfred the king is very fond of monaſteries: peradventure becauſe he never lived in one himſelf. They are indeed neceſſary and expedient for the times; but if times are greatly bettered, it may be we ſhall learn to do without them. And as for ſafety!—only look at Wincheſter, and Croyland, and Ely. Ethelſwitha, juſt as ſhe was ſetting forth from our abbey-gate with her gay retinue, all prankt and glittering in the morning ſun, cried, "Farewell, Ethelfled; I envy you your peaceful life:" but what witteth ſhe, I aſpire to know, of my joys or burthens? She ſees me take my place now and then in the great council, and hears my good report of pilgrims and travellers, and has ſate by while Eadwulf conſulted me about eel dikes and ſalt pans, and what to ſow, and what to mow, and ſo many ambra of malt, and ſo many fotha of firewood, and whether we ſhall ſend ſo many ſyſters of honey to ſuch a monaſtery in return for their hens, or whether we may

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look for ſalmon-trouts from ſuch another in return for our eels; all of which Eadwulf loves to roll under his tongue in hearing of the queen .... Ah, my ſiſter, you ſee not the other half of the gate-poſt!

My little niece is the joy of my life! She is ſtedfaſtly minded to profeſs, and when ſhe cometh to fit years, if ſhe be ſtill of the ſame mind, no doubt, the king will be conſenting. She may be abbeſs of Shafteſbury inſtead of myſelf, if ſhe will. The little lamb clave to me from the firſt, and would reverently lay her hand on my garment, as if it were almoſt too holy to be touched. And ſhe would ſing ſnatches of hymns in her ſleep, and have dreams of heaven; and, if ſhe awoke in the night, would ſlip out of bed, and down upon her knees, with her pretty hands held up, and there, maybe, drop aſleep. Therefore there went a ſaying forth, that ſhe was too good to live. But, nevertheleſs, ſhe is thriving and of good cheer unto this day.

Here endeth the Chronicle of Ethelfled.

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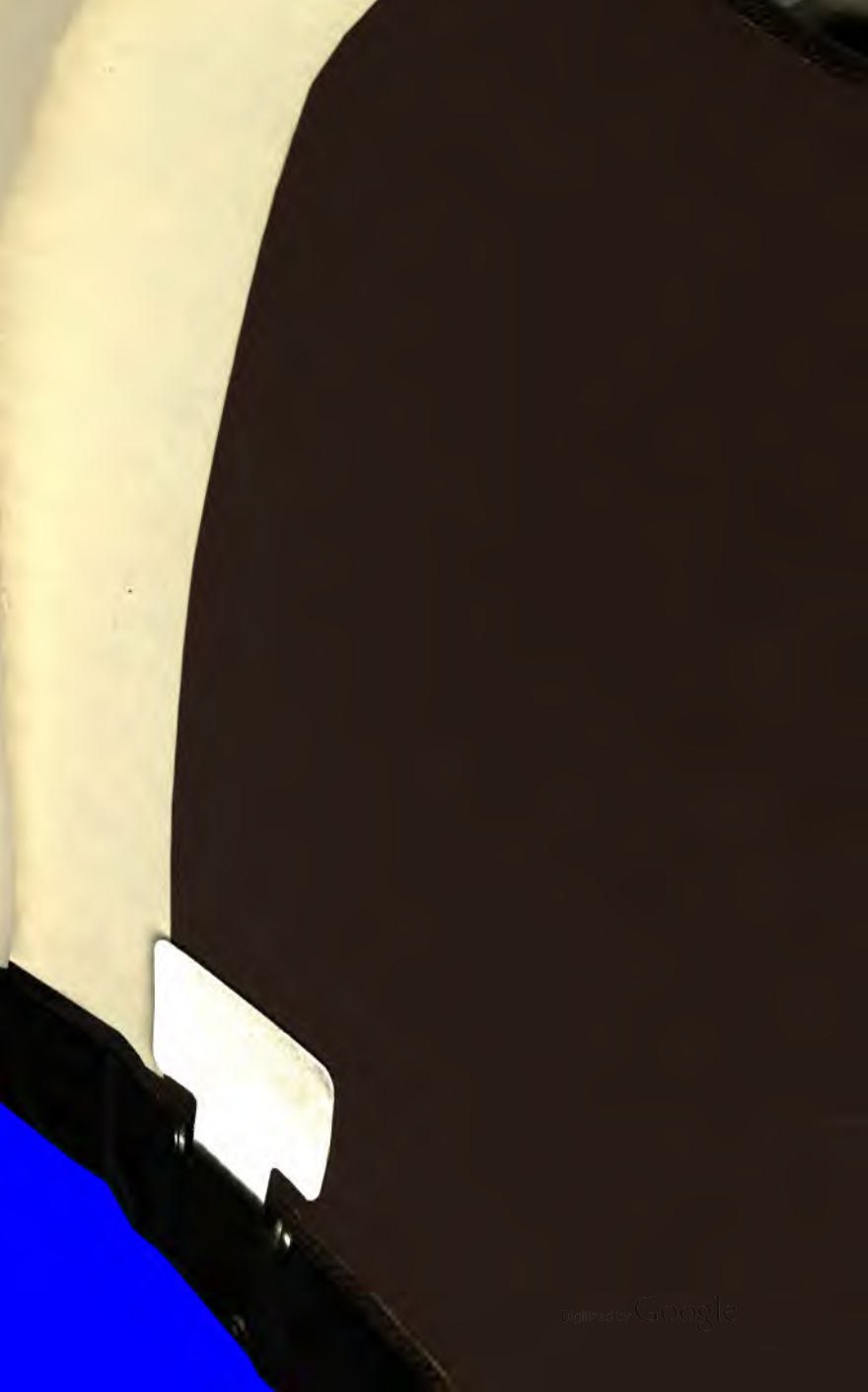
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